

IN QUEST
of
ADVENTURE



MARY · E · MANNIX



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IN QUEST OF ADVENTURE





The child looked at Refugio for some time.—See page 169.

IN QUEST OF ADVENTURE

BY

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NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO
BENZIGER BROTHERS
PUBLISHERS OF BENZIGER'S MAGAZINE

1914

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IN QUEST OF ADVENTURE

CHAPTER I

PLANNING

I MUST have been about eleven years old, my brother was only nine. We had been living for some time in the country, the doctors having declared it necessary for my health, as I was a very delicate, though a very active boy. We were great friends, my brother and I; fond of collecting birds' eggs and butterflies; and great readers also, delighting in stories of travel and adventure.

We played at being fishermen as well, and were fond of getting up early in the morning and going down to the stream which ran behind the garden, though we seldom caught anything worth while; we were not patient enough.

We were more proficient (according to our own honest opinions) in the arts of savage life, fancying ourselves trappers or warriors. We would walk Indian file for an entire morning, without any direct object in so doing, except that of imagining ourselves red men of the forest on the war-path, though we never encountered or were surprised by our enemies. Again, we would make the air hideous with what we imagined were Indian yells and cries, though luckily the scene of these performances was far enough removed from the house not to disturb the other inmates. We had a system of signs and silent gestures so numerous and complicated that in the end they were not understood even by ourselves; but that made them, we thought, all the more mysterious. Our implements of warfare consisted of two old hatchets, which we brandished aloft and swung about incessantly when the fever of war was on, but we took care not to use

them in any more formidable manner, as we had only each other to practise upon. When evening came, and we were too tired to do anything else, we endeavored for half an hour to please our good mother, who was a French woman, by reading the stories of the excellent Countess de Segur, who, however, failed to satisfy our more warlike tastes. She seemed to us very namby-pambyish after such enthralling and soul-curdling tales as "The Bear Hunter," "Young Boers in Vacation Time," "The Battle of the Bisons," "Children of the Prairie," and "Gerard, the Lion Killer." How well I remember the fire which filled my veins, as, carried away by enthusiasm, I would fling aside the book from me while I quoted, in a ringing boyish voice, the following apostrophe:

"Followers of St. Hubert, my brothers! It is to you that I address myself. Night is falling. The forest is deep. You are

in the midst of perils from wild beasts as numerous as the boughs of the trees beneath which you seek shelter; so fierce and loud-voiced as to drown the noise of the mightiest thunder!"

Ah! how I entered into the spirit of that woodland rendezvous; yes, though the thought of it made me tremble from head to foot. I remember especially on one of these occasions having determined to search on the morrow for some such dusky impenetrable shades as those above described. At the same time I knew that if found we would encounter therein neither lions, bears, wolves, bisons, nor troops of wild boars, snapping with their long fangs at the trunks of the trees where we had taken refuge. However, this did not make my appetite for imaginary adventures any the less keen; on the contrary it only whetted it.

The following morning I rose with my determination strengthened by the cheer-

ing light of day. For the first time in our lives my brother and I looked wistfully afar—afar at the blue distance we had never before wished to penetrate.

What lay beyond? we asked each other. Forests, perhaps as dense and dangerous as those within whose bosky depths St. Hubert's disciples had found refuge. But how to reach them? We did not voice our thoughts, but we knew without speaking of it that if we asked permission to go so far afield it would be promptly and positively denied us. But in our hearts all the time was the mutual conviction that a way would be opened for us by the force of circumstances. Our father and mother were going to town to be absent three days. I said to my brother,

"Maurice, we must get over yonder."

"But how can we?" he responded.

"Papa and mama would never let us go—if we asked them."

"If we asked them. No. But we shall not ask them."

"You would never go without permission, Martin?"

"Suppose they should not be here when we wanted to go."

"Oh yes, that's so," was the rejoinder, and we said no more. But we understood each other. Now indeed we were to tread in the footsteps of those whom in our secret hearts we had long desired to emulate. There was to be a spice of guilt, also, in the adventure—just enough to add a new element to our ambition. I do not know what excuses my brother made to himself in his heart, but I reasoned thus: "We do not want to go—to-day. We do not wish to be away when papa and mama are about to start."

"No," said Maurice in a low uncertain voice—looking shyly into my eyes. I turned away. I could not bear to confront what I saw there.

Father and mother were gone. Scarcely had they departed before we began to make our preparations.

"Maurice," said I. "Those woods over yonder are not so very far away, are they?"

"No," he replied. "I think they are very near."

"So they are," I continued. "Wouldn't you like to go over and see?"

"Yes, you're not afraid?"

"Afraid! With our hatchets and clubs—and my bow and arrow. No, indeed."

"Shall we tell Frances?" Frances was our old nurse. She had been in the family twenty years. She adored us; we tyrannized over her in a not disagreeable way.

"Oh, yes, of course," I rejoined, carelessly. "Let us get our things together, Maurice."

At dinner time I said, "Frances,

Maurice and I are going over there to-morrow."

"Over where?" the old woman inquired.

"Just across the road," I replied.
"Where those trees are."

"All right!" said Frances. I did not dare to mention luncheon, as I felt it might give Frances cause for speculation. Besides, an ordinary lunch would have deprived our project of some of its adventurous features. Who ever heard of explorers packing bread and chicken with jelly, fruit, and cake in a commonplace chip basket? No, indeed! I was determined that nothing of the kind should take away from the picturesqueness of our proposed sally. During the afternoon I got a huge piece of dry bread from the pantry, with a large onion, a vegetable, by the way, that neither of us would ever touch. Putting them together in a paper sack, I hid them in the toolhouse, where I knew they would not be seen by anyone else.

"Call us at five, Frances," I said, as we prepared to go up to bed.

"At five!" she exclaimed. "Isn't that very early?"

"Well—it is," I replied. "But we thought it would be fun to get up earlier than usual, and have our work in before the heat of the day."

"What work?" inquired the old woman, who was very matter-of-fact.

"Oh, I meant our walk—our journey, our—oh, nothing!"

"All right," said the compliant Frances. "I'll call ye."

And so she did. I, for one, was very sleepy, but realizing the magnitude of the adventure I speedily roused myself. Maurice also was equal to the occasion. We dressed hurriedly and hastened downstairs, where we found Frances awaiting us with a comfortable breakfast of sausage and buckwheat cakes. We ate heartily, the spirit of adventure not being

strong enough to destroy our normal boyish appetites.

"I am not so sure, boys, if your father and mother would like this," said Frances, who had probably taken counsel of her usual prudent self over night.

"They like us to be out," I replied, my mouth full of buckwheat cakes.

"Yes, so they do," rejoined Frances. "But it is within the grounds, Maurice. You are meaning to go outside?"

"Yes, Frances," I replied. "But there is no danger in going over there. We are not very little boys. It isn't because papa and mama are afraid that we do not go away. It is that our own grounds are so large."

"That may be," replied Frances. "But that is the very reason, because they *are* so large, that I don't see the need of your leaving them. I've really been thinking."

"No, Frances!" I hurriedly inter-

rupted, "after we have gone and got everything ready you are not going to—"

"Easy, easy, Martin," interrupted Frances in her turn. "I said you might go, and you may. But be home early."

To this injunction neither Maurice nor myself made reply. Indeed my brother had been unusually silent; the importance of the expedition we were undertaking had deeply impressed him. His blue eyes sparkled, his pink cheeks grew pinker, he was impatient to be gone. Frances saw us to the door, and left us, telling us to take care of ourselves and not get lost. We assured her that she need have no fears; I did at least. Maurice took her thin cheeks in both hands and kissed her. The old woman smiled; she liked his little coaxing ways. After she had closed the door we stole around the side of the house to the toolshed. The servants were not yet down-

stairs. Lying on a deal table, where we had placed them the night before, were our hatchets, supplemented by a pair of heavy clubs, two slings, a bag containing stones for the slings, though why we burdened ourselves with them when they were to be found in abundance in the neighborhood I can not tell. Probably we were of the opinion that pioneers were in the habit of loading themselves down with accouterments. There was also the paper bag containing the bread and onion, to stay our hunger in the unknown wilderness toward which we were faring. We divided the burdens, I taking the bag of stones, being the strongest. As we passed through the gate we looked at each other, an involuntary emotion of uncertainty seizing our hearts. We stood in the middle of the road and looked about us. Up and down the broad dusty pathway we had often been, but across, beyond the zig-zag fence we had never set

foot. On one side some bright-colored larches invited us; on the other a grove of older trees. A couple of Mexican canaries in one of the spreading oaks began to sing.

"Let us go that way," said Maurice, pointing in their direction.

"Yes," I rejoined, "I like it better. Come."

We climbed the fence, soon penetrating the miniature forest so far that we came to a broad opening through which flowed a narrow but rapid stream. Wild flowers grew along its mossy banks, rushes waved in the wind above them. Forgetting the purpose of our quest—the encounter with savages or at least wild beasts in the forest, we seated ourselves on the border of the stream. We felt fatigued, but delighted. We were in an enchanted land.

CHAPTER II

THE START

As WE sat there looking around us, we could have imagined ourselves miles away from home, and probably did; I, at least, fancied that we were transported to a new world. At that moment I realized for the first time how strictly we had been brought up, how narrow, as to space, had been our environment. I drew long breaths of freedom. I yearned to be up and going once more. But Maurice felt tired; so he said with a yawn when I suggested that we begin to move,

“There is no hurry,” stretching himself on the thick grass. “We were up so early. I am sleepy.”

“Well, sleep then,” I replied, giving way to a yawn myself, the approach of

which I had not at all suspected. I lay down beside him. When I opened my eyes the sun was quite high in the heavens. I looked at my watch; it was ten o'clock. My brother still slept. "Wake up, wake up, Maurice!" I cried, shaking him. He opened his blue eyes, very, very slowly. "Come," I said. "The day will be over before we have done anything."

"I am hungry!" answered Maurice.

"And I believe I am too," I rejoined, opening the paper sack and taking out the bread, which I broke in four pieces.

"Two for now, two for another time," I said, looking ruefully at the onion, which I had forgotten to peel.

"Must we eat some of it?" inquired Maurice with an inflection of disgust in his tone.

"Yes, why not?" I replied.

"But why?" he queried.

"To season our bread. The peasants do it in books."

"But we are not peasants; we are American boys."

"It is wholesome. It keeps scurvy away," said I.

"Oh, that is for sailors on ships. Do throw it away, Martin," pleaded Maurice.

I shook my head firmly. "No," I replied. "It is wholesome," and peeling the detested vegetable I bit a piece, and handed the remainder to Maurice. But he shut his lips resolutely, "No, I shan't eat it," he said. "I would rather have a drink of water."

"Why did I forget to fetch a bottle full," said I.

"What was the need?" asked Maurice. "There is water right in front of us. A tin cup would have been better than a bottle."

"We can drink from our caps," I said.

"They will be all wet if we do," rejoined Maurice, almost brutally, I thought. "It is only when some one is

lying wounded and bleeding on the bank of a stream that they bring him water in a cap."

"How shall we drink, then?" I inquired.

"On our hands and knees," replied my brother. "That is how to do it."

"Of course it is!" I exclaimed joyfully, and rushing to the brook we leaned over it, and at the imminent risk of falling in we quenched our thirst. The water was warm, and rather muddy, but we wiped our lips with our handkerchiefs, and again shouldering our packs, or what stood for packs, we resumed our way. On and on we trudged, without meeting a single soul, or seeing the outline of a single house in the distance. The stream grew wider; after a while we began to see that we must either return or contrive some way of crossing it. Until now we had been able to pursue our journey by stepping over it; this was no longer possible.

"It is a snaky thing," said Maurice.

"See how it winds in and out, up and down."

"It is pretty, though," said I, turning to look at the silver ribbon stretching behind us as far as the eye could reach.

"Yes, but how shall we get across? If we don't find a way we shall not be home by noon."

"Do you want to be home as early as that?" I inquired in some surprise. "I thought we were going to explore."

"That is what we have been doing all the morning. I am awfully tired," said my brother.

I grew impatient. "I'm afraid you are too much of a girl," I said. "You would not be a successful pioneer at all, Maurice."

"I would if I had to," was the rejoinder, given a little sullenly. "But I don't have to."

"All right," I replied. I was really somewhat fatigued myself, although I did

not wish to acknowledge it. "Shall we wade through the water?"

"It is too deep," answered my brother, peering into the stream. "And there are little round holes in it. We might get stuck."

"Let us cut down a tree, then," said I. "We can make a bridge and creep over it, on our hands and knees."

"Where is the tree?" asked Maurice.

"The woods are full of them," I rejoined.

"Yes, but they are too big."

"Yonder on the bank, standing all alone is a little tree," I replied. "Shall we cut that down with our hatchets? I will be Robinson Crusoe and you can be my Man Friday."

"All right," said Maurice gaily. We seized our dull hatchets, and began to hack at the tree, a small poplar. Now and then in our labors we would hit each other, instead of the tree.

"Let us play we are Indians fighting," said Maurice, after a particularly severe whack he had given me. "It won't hurt so much then, if we get excited."

"That's a good idea," I responded. And we fell to work once more. At last the tree began to groan, to sway, to fall. Responsive to our desires, it dropped in a straight line across the stream; I went first, dragging the axes and clubs beside me through the water; my brother followed. On the other side we sat down, our backs to the water.

"That was a good job, and a safe passage," said I.

"Fine," answered Maurice, drawing his hands through the branches, which lay, as the top had fallen, on our side of the water. "It is a poplar," he continued. "Isn't it curious that there should be only one poplar in this whole forest?" Now the place where we were was not in reality a forest, but meadow land, over-

grown with trees, most of them quite young.

"Perhaps some one planted it," said I.

"If that is so, we ought not to have cut it down," replied my brother.

"Necessity knows no law," I rejoined gravely. "It was a matter of life and death."

Maurice burst out laughing. He had a trick of doing that at inopportune moments. But seeing me color with vexation he hastened to add, "Yes, we could not have crossed, unless we had done it." He was a kind-hearted little fellow, my brother Maurice. We shouldered our burdens and began to walk on.

"Are we going toward home now?" asked Maurice, after we had gone some distance.

"I think so," I replied. "We shall have to walk a long way though, before we get there."

"About the tree!" said Maurice.

"What shall we do, if we find it belongs to somebody?"

"We shall not find that out. How can we?"

"I don't know," said Maurice.

We walked on in silence. The trees began to grow thicker. Far behind them, we perceived a house in the distance. It had several high chimneys and was built of stone.

"That looks like an orchard," said I.

"It is an orchard," rejoined Maurice. "I can see the apples, red, green, and yellow. Isn't it large? I wonder who lives in that great stone house?"

"Shall we go nearer?" I asked.

"Better not," replied my brother, "They may have a dog there."

As we stood a moment, uncertain what to do, we heard a noise in the bushes. We both turned; before us stood an old woman in a dark blue blouse and very short skirt, beneath which could be seen

a pair of high rubber boots. She wore a black sunbonnet; from its depths a pair of deep, dark eyes looked out upon us, very fiercely, we thought, very angrily. She had snow-white curling hair, coming down well over her forehead. She wore leather gauntlet gloves, and carried a long thick staff in her hand.

"It is a witch!" whispered Maurice, stepping very close to me.

A witch! My heart bounded at the thought. Here was a real adventure, well worth while. And I did not feel in the least afraid. I had said my prayers that morning, and had a miraculous medal around my neck on a silver chain. So had Maurice. No witch that ever breathed—if there were such things—could hurt us, protected as we were by the dear, immaculate Mother.

"Hello," exclaimed the old woman, in a masculine but not unpleasing voice. And as she spoke, the fierce look seemed

to die out of her eyes—if it had ever been there—and they twinkled pleasantly. “Hello!” she repeated, as we did not answer, and then I found courage to reply,

“Good morning, madam!” One could not have said “Hello!” to a white-haired old woman, even though it had been her own form of greeting.

“I see you have some politeness,” she rejoined. “Even though you are a couple of savages.”

“Savages!” I rejoined, though not at all resentfully, for that day we had started out with the intention of playing either the pioneer or gipsy or barbarian rôle, as occasion offered.

“Yes, savages,” she replied. “Wasn’t it you two who cut down that poplar tree by the stream behind there?”

“Yes, madam, we did,” I rejoined, beginning to tremble. “Did it belong to you?”

“It belongs to the owner of this place,”

she rejoined. "I was down yonder looking after the osiers, and heard the blows of your hatchets. When I followed them up, you were gone, and the mischief done."

"We are very sorry," said I. Maurice was speechless. "You see, madam, we did not think till afterward that it belonged to anybody, or we would not have done it. And yet I don't see how we could have helped it."

"Why?" inquired the "witch," her eyes still kindly.

"We had to get across."

"Where are you going?"

"Home!"

"Where is your home?"

I looked around me. "Over yonder," I replied. "At least I think so."

"You think so! Don't you know?"

"I am not sure. We came out very early this morning—the sun was over there, and now I can't exactly say where

it ought to be—that is—what direction we ought to take.”

“Why did you come? Where were you going?”

“We were having an adventure. We were pioneers—or——”

“Oh! I understand. And now, after leaving destruction in your path, as many pioneers and savages do, you are tired of your adventure and want to go home. Is that it?”

“We did not intend to stay very long,” ventured Maurice, the first time he had spoken. “We made a bridge of the tree.”

“Oh! I see. A mistake, also. You should have brought a compass. Pioneers *never* travel without one, if they can get it. I feel certain you are going the wrong way, for I think I recognize in this smaller boy a resemblance to Mr. Henry Santley.”

“He is my father,” said Maurice.

"You are brothers?" asked the "witch" turning to me.

"Yes, madam," I replied.

"Does he allow you to cut down your neighbors' trees?"

"He would not have allowed it, if he had known," I said. "And we would not have done it, if we had thought."

"Yes, I understand," replied the old woman, taking off her bonnet and beginning to fan herself with it, after she had run her fingers through her hair, which made it stand up all over her head, like a silver halo. Then leaning both hands on her staff, exactly like the pictures of old witches one sees in books, she asked, "Do you know why that poplar was planted there?"

"No," we both replied, in very subdued voices.

"To mark the apex of a triangular lot about which there is a lawsuit."

"We can replace it, madam," I said.

"We will ask father to get one, and have it planted in the very spot."

"I am glad you are so well disposed," said the old woman. "Go home now, tell your father about it, and if he will permit you, come back this afternoon or tomorrow. We will see about it then."

"Shall we bring a poplar with us?"

"Oh, no, this is not the time for planting poplars."

"Very well, madam," I said. "And will you tell the owner of the tree that we are sorry?"

"I shall tell her."

"Are you—are you—her gardener?"

"Her head-gardener."

"You were good not to scold us," said Maurice.

The old woman laughed merrily and pinched him on the cheeks.

"Did you take me for a witch?" she said. "I do look like one, don't I?"

We were both crimson with confusion.

But she evidently did not mind, and putting on her bonnet she said, "Go back the way you came; cross your bridge, and get home as fast as you can. You were going the wrong way. And remember, boys, you must come back. I depend on your honor."

"We'll be sure to, if father will let us," said I.

Suddenly as she had come, the queer old woman disappeared through the bushes, and we began to retrace our steps.

CHAPTER III

THE RETURN

OUR return was not as joyful as the departure had been. We were greatly fatigued, our steps lagged, and our burdens felt very heavy. We were greeted by Frances with grave reproaches, as it was after three o'clock.

"What have ye got with ye?" she inquired. "What in the name of all that is great are ye carrying? Did ye take all that truck along? Old hatchets and clubs and slung-shots! Yes, slung-shots. And what did ye mean to do with all them curious things?"

"Play pioneers—or Blackfoot Indians, or Robinson Crusoe," said I. "It's lots of fun. We were explorers."

"And right tired ye look for it. See

here, boys. I've been in a terrible fright about ye. If ye'll promise me never, never, to go off that way again—or ask leave to do it, I'll not say a word to the master about it. But unless ye promise I'll——”

“Oh, we are going to tell papa all about it, Frances,” I rejoined. “Then he can scold us if he likes. But the father of the Prodigal Son didn't say a cross word to him, after he had been gone years and years and had done all sorts of dreadful things, and I'm sure *our* father will be as kind as he was.”

“If you're not the queerest boy, Martin,” said Frances, her ill humor fast vanishing. “I'm afraid he will say more than a word to ye, though.”

Maurice looked at me. He was thinking of the tree. We were so tired after our long tramp that we went to bed quite early. But we had a good bath and an excellent dinner first; one would have

thought we had been absent days instead of hours, so glad were the servants to see us.

Father and mother returned next morning, a little sooner than we had expected them. We felt that it behooved us to tell our story as soon as possible; the funny little old woman would probably be wondering if we were going to keep our promise. But some one came to see father in the morning, and some one else after luncheon, so that it was quite three o'clock when Maurice and I waylaid him in the garden.

"Father," said I. "We have something to tell you."

"What is it?" he inquired. "Have you been finding some more birds' eggs?"

"No," I replied. "But yesterday after you had gone, Maurice and I went exploring and——"

"Where did you go?"

"Over yonder," pointing to the woods.

"You had asked permission of your mother?"

"No, we told Frances."

"You *told* Frances."

"Yes. Was it wrong?"

"I see no reason why you should not go beyond the grounds occasionally, though your mother does not like it. She is afraid of tramps. But you should always ask permission."

"After this we will," I replied humbly. "But that isn't all, father. We walked and walked, and came to a place where the stream was so wide we couldn't get across. So we cut down a little tree, and made a bridge."

"Cut down a little tree! How did you do it?"

"With our hatchets."

My father laughed. "It must have been a frightful job."

"It was. But it was a very *thin* tree, papa."

"And when you had hacked it down what did you do?"

"It fell straight across, so we did not have the trouble of moving it, and we crawled over on our hands and knees."

"Was the water deep?"

"Not very."

"Why didn't you wade over?"

"We didn't want to get wet. And there were little holes in the mud; we thought there might have been water snakes in them."

"Just so. And you got over without accident?"

"Yes. But after a while we remembered that it was a young poplar, and the only one of the kind near. We began to think maybe some one had planted it, and just as we were talking about it a tiny old woman stepped from behind the bushes. At first we thought she was a witch."

"A witch!" exclaimed my father.

"Martin, you are too old to believe in witches."

"It is fun though," I said.

"What did she do?"

"She told us the tree had been planted there by the owner of the place to mark—mark—what did she say, Maurice?" I inquired, turning to my brother.

"To mark the apex of a lawsuit," answered Maurice innocently.

My father laughed loudly. "That is good," he said. "That is very good."

"We offered to plant another tree," I resumed. "But she said this was not the time for planting trees."

"Was she angry?"

"Not very. Not at all—at the end. But she said we were to tell you, and promise to come back yesterday or to-day, and let her know what you said. She knew you, because she thought Maurice looked like you."

"Did she tell you her name?"

"No, she said she was the head-gardener."

"How did she look?"

"Like a witch," said Maurice. "But not a cross or ugly one, father."

"Like a good, kind witch, eh?"

"Yes, she had a short skirt and high rubber boots, and a funny bonnet. When she took it off her hair stood up all over her head in short, white curls. And she had a thick stick, longer than herself."

"I think I know her," remarked my father dryly. "I have business over there myself to-day. Shall we go together?"

"It is a long walk," said Maurice. He was not very anxious to set out, I fancy.

"We can take the carriage and go around by the road," said father. "And mother shall go with us."

It was a right merry party that set out about four or half past, with John driv-

ing. The front of the big stone house was grim and gray, but the ivy that covered it beautified its somberness. The gardens were lovely; a fountain played in their midst.

"Shall we ask for the old woman?" whispered Maurice to mother.

"We shall probably see her later," she replied. "Papa will get out first, leaving us in the carriage. He has some business to transact with the mistress of the house, Mrs. Vandeling. After that we shall probably meet her also, and learn what reparation we can make for the felling of the tree."

Father left us, and was gone some time. He returned at last, and said, "Mrs. Vandeling wished to see us all." We alighted, and there, at the head of the broad stone steps, dressed in gray satin, even to her dainty slippers, stood a tiny old lady. A lace cap, with long lappets

perched on top of her thick, snow-white curls, stood all around her head like a silver halo.

She extended both hands to greet us, enjoying our wonderment and confusion to the utmost.

"The witch has been expecting you, boys," she exclaimed, her deep, dark eyes dancing with amusement. "She has changed her garb a little, but she is still the same old witch you met yesterday morning."

But we were soon friends. Mrs. Vandeling insisted on our remaining for tea, which was served on the broad piazza, and Maurice and I had a fine run through the gardens. During our visit, we learned that father, who was a lawyer, had been conducting a case against our neighbor for a city client, who, however, had lost it. It was about the boundary line which Mrs. Vandeling had mentioned to us. Of course, she was rejoiced at the result,

and made us all feel happy. When we were leaving, she said,

“Now, boys, we will consider the popular incident closed, except that we shall leave the tree lying where it is—across the stream, and you can use it as a bridge whenever you come, by the short cut, to see me. I am a lonely old woman. My neighbors for the most part are too much taken up with their own affairs to think about me. But I am very fond of children, especially boys; probably because I never had any of my own. My girls are married, and live far, far, from me, across the ocean. Now, if you will please to consider yourselves my grandsons I shall be delighted to see you whenever you may wish to pay me a visit. You can imagine me all sorts of things in these wide gardens; you can fancy yourselves Indians, Chinese, Turks, anything you like. You may make all the noise you please, and I know, from the incident of

the poplar tree, that you will do very little mischief. In the house I have all sorts of curious things from every land under the sun, which I shall be glad to show you. I have been a great traveler, and nothing could give me more pleasure than to tell you of things and people and places I have seen. Now, have I offered you sufficient inducement to become friendly neighbors?"

We thought so, indeed, and said so. And Maurice added in his coaxing little voice, "Won't you let us plant another poplar there by the stream? We should like to, shouldn't we, Martin?"

"Bless your heart, if you wish to, do it," replied the kind old lady, pinching the boy's cheeks once more, a habit of hers with which he was soon to grow familiar.

For five years the pleasant friendship continued. There was no need to plant another poplar, the roots of the first had not been disturbed, and new shoots made

their appearance in the following spring. After a year's time it had grown quite tall, and put forth a vigorous foliage. At the end of the second a pair of black-birds built themselves a nest in the branches. When the third year was well advanced, we often found Mrs. Vandeling waiting for us under the shade, her knitting in her hand. This, of course, was only in the vacations, which we passed in our country home. During the winter and spring we were at school. When we were returning to the city, at the close of the fourth vacation, the bridge was covered with moss and vines, which Mrs. Vandeling had planted on the banks of the stream. The gardener had made a couple of hand-rails; we no longer went across on all fours.

But when the fifth summer came, though the blackbirds still sang in the thicket nearby, and the wild roses on the border of the stream mingled their per-

fume with that of the climbing jessamine she had planted, our old friend no longer awaited our coming on the other side, welcoming hands extended. She had gone to walk in the heavenly gardens.

CHAPTER IV

MY FATHER'S ADVENTURE

IT MAY have occurred to the reader by the circumstances related in the preceding chapter that it would be a very difficult undertaking to cross a stream on a young, narrow poplar trunk on hands and knees. That thought suggested itself to father, who went walking with us in our newly discovered camping-grounds a few mornings after we had established ourselves in the friendship of our new and somewhat eccentric neighbor. This is what he said on the subject.

“Boys,” he began, “I do not see how it was possible for you to go over the stream on that slender trunk, on all fours. It seems to me there was not width enough there for such a feat. It was a feat, indeed.”

"Well," said I, after glancing at Maurice for an explanation, which I might have known he would not have offered to give—as I was generally spokesman. "It *was* hard, father. First we had to stretch one hand very far forward, and drag one foot after us. It was the same with the other hand and foot. But it wasn't very hard. We got across in two stretchings."

Father laughed. "But *why* did you do it?" he inquired.

"We thought it was more like being in ambush," said I. "We wanted to crouch."

"Oh!" exclaimed father. "That was it! If you wanted to crouch, I suppose there is no fault to be found with the motive. But you might have walked across on tiptoe, balancing yourselves with long poles which you could have cut from young trees in the neighborhood. That would have been interesting, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, yes," I rejoined, thoughtfully. "That would have been like the Permian Indians, wouldn't it? But lately we have been playing Iroquois and Comanche."

"Ah! I see," rejoined my father. "That explains it."

"Now, when I was a boy I would have taken off my shoes and stockings, rolled up my trousers, and waded across," he continued.

"But mother won't let us do that," replied Maurice. "She thinks we will take cold."

"I know it," rejoined father, "and no doubt she is right. Mother generally is. And there's another thing, boys. This stream gets wider in the rainy season, and perhaps deeper. If you should want to cross then, you could not wade. Now I propose to strengthen the little bridge with the addition of some willow saplings which we can bind together—fasten on either side of the main trunk lengthwise

and then across—and so strengthen it. What do you say?”

Of course we fell in with the plan, and a busy and pleasant morning was spent in completing the bridge and making it easy for mother to pass over if she should ever want to walk to our new friend's house, who later had a railing put on either side, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

“Boys,” said father, as we were working, running to and fro with the withes which he skilfully bound together, “I have been reflecting very seriously on your late adventure. Mother and I have had some conversation on the subject. We were very sorry, as well as surprised, to learn that you had taken advantage of our absence to leave our own grounds. It was not what we expected of you. But I am willing to give you the benefit of the doubt, and accept your explanation, if it be satisfactory. First, tell me, Mar-

tin, was it a sudden whim of yours? Did you think of it only after we had gone?"

"No, father," I replied at once, though in some embarrassment. "We talked of it before."

"And why did you not say something of it to us? Why not have asked permission?"

"We were afraid you might not allow us to go," said Maurice, promptly.

"So you discussed it then, in that way?"

"No, father, we did not say a single word about that," said I—"but, but——"

"We just thought in our minds you would not be willing to let us go."

"Quite so. That is what is called a tacit understanding. It shows the depth of the conspiracy."

"Conspiracy!" I exclaimed. "It wasn't anything like that, father."

"Yes, that is what it may be called—a mild conspiracy but reprehensible all the same. However, boys will be boys, and

I have never believed that mine were angels. But I have one thing to say. Never deceive your parents. Being frank and outspoken may sometimes interfere with your plans, but it pays in the long run, for body and soul. Whenever you are in doubt be sure to ask advice and put concealment far behind you. You may not always be permitted to do what you wish, but you must take it for granted that your parents are concerned only for your good, though it may sometimes interfere with your amusement. Now promise, both of you, that you will be perfectly open and above board in all your undertakings."

We promised. Father then continued: "Mother and I have concluded that you are large enough now to have a little more liberty than you have had up to this time; that you may go outside of the grounds now and then, on your exploring expeditions, but not without permission. There

is a good deal of truth in the saying that if you give a goat a long tether he will be satisfied with a short one. Do you know what that means?"

"That we will not be so anxious to go so far when we know we may, if we want to," said Maurice.

"Well said," laughed father, patting him on the shoulder.

"I don't think that will make any difference with us," I said. "I'm sure we shall be always going somewhere if we may."

"Don't be too eager," said father. "He that goes too far afield often regrets it. You inherit your love of adventure from me. When I was a boy I was always in search of something new, strange, and wonderful, and once, in particular, I came to grief."

"Were you ever disobedient, father?" asked Maurice.

"I am afraid so," was the reply.

"That is, occasionally. Once I ran away. What do you think of that?"

"You ran away!" we both exclaimed.

"Yes. Shall I tell you about it?"

"Oh, do."

"Very well, I will. Our work is about finished now for this morning. I will tell you about it as we go home." One on either hand we pressed close to his side, and he began:

"You already know that during the absence of my father and mother in Europe I lived with my grandfather and grandmother for a year. They were very kind, but very strict with me, fearing to allow me to do anything of which my parents might not approve. They lived on a farm, and I had ample freedom to run where I chose, but within certain limits, of course. A circus came to our neighborhood; my grandfather had expected to take me, but he was not well the day it arrived. My grandmother was an in-

valid, and never left the house. Some older boys would have taken me, but I was not permitted to go with them. I begged and pleaded, but my grandfather was inexorable and finally spoke to me in a very angry tone. It was the first time; he had a hot temper when roused, and I had inherited it. I answered him with some warmth, and he slapped me quite hard. I was furious, seeing only my own side of the case; and a feeling of longing and loneliness swept over me. I wanted my father and mother. Tears streamed from my eyes. Clenching my fists, I ran out of the house and down the road as fast as my legs could carry me."

"Where did you mean to go?" asked Maurice.

"I did not know. Anywhere away from Willow Farm. Many plans surged through my excited brain. I would be a gipsy—I had seen some in the vicinity a few days previous. I would go west and

become a cowboy, but finally I resolved to get to New York, seek some vessel about to sail for Europe, and after serving as cabin boy, and being shipwrecked, I would join my parents in Europe."

"Would you have known where to find them, father?" asked the ever-practical Maurice.

"Not at all; but that added a new element of zest to the situation. I knew their post-office address. It was Paris; and if they were not there when I arrived I could follow them all over until I found them. I rather enjoyed the prospect, and as it began to shape itself in my mind it seemed very feasible. By the time I had arrived at the decision regarding my European trip I felt very tired, and thought I would rest in a grove of trees that were ahead of me. Some blackberry bushes on the roadside first engaged my attention, however, for I was getting hungry. I gathered a quantity in my straw

hat, and was about to climb the fence when I heard a loud 'Hello!' behind me. I turned and saw a wagon-load of boys en route, I knew, to the circus."

" 'Where are you going, Fred?' cried one of them.

" 'Just taking a walk,' I rejoined.

" 'Not going to the circus?'

" 'No,' I replied, 'Grandfather is sick.'

" 'Come with us!'

"For a moment I hesitated, but I had been too well-trained to commit what seemed such a cold-blooded act of disobedience, as that would have been, though I was contemplating a far greater one.

" 'No, I can't,' I shouted back, already on the other side of the fence. But when they had gone I threw myself on the ground and cried bitterly. After the fit had passed I ate the blackberries and lay down again. I had resolved to sleep during the day, so as not to be discovered, and to travel by night. When I awoke, the

moonlight was filtering through the thick foliage. All the sounds of night pervaded the place. I shivered with cold; having eaten nothing but blackberries since morning I felt very hungry. I did not know what time of night it was, but it seemed very late to me. At first I did not dare to move, but after a while, beginning to feel that it could not be as lonely on the road as it was in the woods, I climbed over the fence once more. For a long time I sat on the bank above the roadside with my head in my hands. It ached badly. I would have given a great deal to be lying in my comfortable bed at Willow Farm; all my anger against my good grandfather had vanished. I remembered only his kindness, knew that he must be in great trouble on my account, and wondered whether it might not kill my sick, feeble grandmother to know that I had disappeared. Cowboys and cabin-boys were no longer objects of envy. The

pleasures of prospective shipwreck had all vanished."

"Why didn't you go home, then?" I inquired. "Were you afraid?"

"Yes, but not in the way you mean, perhaps," said father. "I was not fearful that my grandfather would scold or punish me, but I dreaded the dark—the lonely night. The moon was setting, owls and nightbirds were screeching in the trees, a mocking-bird warbling in the distance. I did not know whom or what I might meet on the road. I could not bear to start."

"How old were you, father?" I asked.

"About eleven, and a boy who, although he had *dreamed* adventures, had never had any. After some time I resolved to remain where I was until morning, and was about to re-climb the fence and lie down under the trees again when I heard the rumbling of wheels, and the shouts of many joyful young voices. I went down

the bank and stood in the road. In a few moments they appeared—the boys returning from the circus.”

“ ‘Why, it’s little Mayhew!’ cried a young man who had worked for my grandfather. ‘What are you doing here?’

“ ‘I fell asleep,’ I replied.

“ ‘The folks will be pretty near out of their heads,’ he went on. ‘Come, jump in, and we’ll take you home.’

“I lost no time in doing so. The crowd did not pay much attention to me; they were full of the circus. But it had lost all its charms for me; I thought only of the foolishness and ingratitude of my conduct, of my grandfather and grandmother. We were soon at the farmhouse. Lights could be seen burning in all the windows. I knew the cause. The wagon stopped. I jumped down and made my way to the door as quickly as I could. It stood wide open. My grandfather was

lying on a settee in the hall. His face was pale, but he was not asleep.

“‘Grandfather!’ I said timidly. He arose quickly. ‘Thank God, my boy!’ he cried. ‘Where have you been?’

“I told him.

“‘Peter and John and the men from Scott’s are out looking for you,’ he said. ‘Come to grandma; she will be able to sleep now. You have given everybody a bad day, Charlie.’

“‘I will never do it again,’ I replied, between my sobs. ‘I lost my temper, and——’

“‘So did I,’ said my grandfather. ‘We won’t do so any more, boy; it is a silly and shameful thing to get angry.’

“After that there was no more trouble. Grandfather and I understood each other perfectly, and I am glad to say I never deceived him.”

CHAPTER V

THE HOUSE WITH THE GOLDEN WINDOWS

IT WAS in the second year of our acquaintance with the lady of the poplar tree that a curious adventure befell us. Father had bought a bicycle for each of us, and we had become very familiar with the roads in the vicinity. By this time mother, too, had begun to see that we were to be trusted and our expeditions often occupied the entire day. Lately we had occasionally diverged from our usual route, as we had discovered several blind lanes seeming to lead nowhere and apparently not much traveled. Father explained this to us by telling us that a great deal of the property in the neighborhood had been fenced in by new owners, who did not wish to give the public the right of way which they had formerly enjoyed.

"We don't care," said Maurice. "We don't want to get into anybody's property. But it's awfully nice to wheel the whole length of the lane and then turn round again. The ground is so firm there."

"I suppose you often imagine you are going to discover something or meet with a thrilling adventure," said mother. "It must be interesting."

"Perhaps," I rejoined. "And some day we may."

And one day we did. It came about in this way.

We had often seen at a distance, in our rides, the roof of a broad, low house, peeping through the trees. Sometimes we lost it altogether, while again we would seem to be very close. Yet we never passed it. We were perplexed at this, not understanding how a house could have been built in the midst of green fields or woods, without any apparent approach.

66 *The House with Golden Windows*

Time and again as we rode homeward toward sunset, its windows, always closed, reflected the sunlight in full blaze, so that we had come to call it "The House with the Golden Windows." Try whatever road we passed, it stared us full in the face, and always appeared to be about the same distance from us.

"Let's ask mother if she knows who lives there," said Maurice, one evening as the "Golden Windows" flashed across our sight.

"Mother wouldn't know," I replied. "But father might."

"I think it would be fun to go over and see for ourselves," said Maurice. "I don't believe anybody lives there. Maybe it's haunted."

"That's a capital idea," I rejoined. "I don't believe there are any haunted houses though, do you?"

Maurice shrugged his shoulders.

"Some houses are very queer," he said.

"You know we've read lots of things about strange happenings in houses."

"Yes," I answered. "Rats are usually the cause. But I'd like to find out."

"How can we get at the place?" asked Maurice.

"Let's try to-morrow. We can start early," said I.

Accordingly, the next afternoon as we were setting out I informed mother that we were going to try to reach the mysterious house. At first she demurred, but finally consented. Father was not at home. She was afraid we might get lost, but we assured her that was impossible. Fortune seemed to favor us. Not far from the house a long lane led to a thick clump of trees, from which, when reached, we had always turned back.

"Let's have a spin up the lane," said Maurice, as we started.

"All right," I replied. "And then we'll go back along the road, leave our bicycles

near the fence when we get opposite the house, and climb over. We can walk the rest of the way. I don't care how many fences I climb, do you?"

"No," he answered cheerily. "The pioneers and Indians had to climb a lot, I imagine."

I was sorry to disillusion him, but felt it my duty to do so. "You forget," I said, a little cautiously, wishing to spare his feelings. "You forget, Maurice, that pioneers *made* the fences. Before they came, there were none."

"Sure enough," he replied. "But that need not make any difference to us, only it's a little harder than it was for them. They had a clear way through the jungle."

When we arrived at the clump of trees, we dismounted for the first time in that immediate locality.

"Let's peep through. Maybe there's a fence behind them."

We did so, but instead of a fence we dis-

covered, to our great joy, a continuation of the lane, which turned at an abrupt angle beyond the dense foliage.

"Look here," I said, "we're in good luck. I bet you this goes directly to 'The House with the Golden Windows.'"

And so it proved. We were there in a very few moments. And what a forlorn, neglected place it was. But we reveled in it. It was the abandoned homestead—the mysterious dwelling—the haunted house of our books and imaginings. There was a low stone wall about the garden over which some kind of yellow flowering moss ran riot. The paths were overgrown, and all kinds of brightly colored annuals were blooming there. But they were choked throughout by weeds that overtopped them in many places, straggling out along the graveled paths, and almost up to the very door. We roamed around the garden for a while, gradually nearing the house as we lin-

gered, now under a broad oak encircled by a comfortable rustic seat, now close to the wellhouse with its old-fashioned sweep, the water gleaming darkly and deep below.

"The door is open!" whispered Maurice in a voice of surprise, as we approached the house. "Can any one be living here?"

"No," I rejoined. "It is as silent as a grave. I have not heard a sound, have you?"

"No," Maurice answered. "Yet people may be in the house. Perhaps they are asleep."

"In broad daylight?" I cried. "I don't believe it. This door has been open for years, most likely."

"Are you afraid to go in?" asked my brother.

"Afraid! No!" I replied. "Are you?"

"Not a bit," said he.

I was afraid, however, and I fancy

Maurice was also. But we would not have confessed that weakness to each other. We stood for a moment on the doorstep, looking up at the windows, over which spiders had woven thick webs, inside and out.

"The window panes would not be like that if people were living here," I said.

"No," replied Maurice, and the next instant, darting back, he continued in a low voice: "Martin, I saw a man's face up there, just then."

"Up where?" I inquired.

"At the farthest window."

"It can't be. You're frightened," I replied.

"No, I'm not," he answered stoutly, and set his foot upon the threshold, pushing the door wide open as he did so.

I followed him. It was a low, square room, entirely destitute of furniture. The floor was thick with dust. A broad mantel-shelf projected above the fireplace,

which was wide and deep. The walls were decorated with old-fashioned landscape paper, representing a cool green wood, with a running stream, over which a rustic bridge extended. Beneath it two figures, a man and a woman, sat, fishing in the brook. The blue sky above, just visible through the branches of tall, interlacing trees, made an attractive border. The paper on the ceiling was meant, I suppose, to portray an arbor; green leaves intertwining seemed supported by a trellis-work of rustic design. We had never seen anything like it before; it amazed and delighted us.

"Isn't it beautiful?" said Maurice, at last. "It is like a panorama, isn't it? I wonder if the other rooms are the same way?"

"Let us go and see," I rejoined, opening the door which led to the adjacent apartment. It must have once been a library, for there were marks of shelves

upon the walls, which were papered a dark red, with gilt diamonds arranged in columns at regular intervals. As in the front room, the windows were large with wide seats, whereon one could have sat the whole day long dreaming through a fairy tale and looking upon the garden.

Beyond this room was another. The paper represented Venetian scenes. As a large kitchen was next to it, we supposed this to have been the dining-room. A musty, dusty smell pervaded the whole house; I was beginning to feel sick and I said.

“Let’s go out for a few moments before we go upstairs. I want a breath of fresh air, don’t you?”

We retraced our steps and, passing through the open door, sat down upon the broad platform of the piazza, our backs against the wall.

“Isn’t it still?” said Maurice. “Do you want to go in again?”

"Yes," I replied. "We haven't been upstairs yet."

"Why," said Maurice, looking around him, "there are no stairs!"

"There must be," I replied. "There is a second story."

"But I didn't see any stairs."

"Neither did I," rejoined my brother. "Come, let's look for them."

Stimulated by curiosity we went inside once more. There was no visible staircase. There seemed to be several closets in the dining-room. Opening these one by one, we came at last upon a narrow stairway built between the walls of the kitchen and dining-room. We looked up doubtfully, neither anxious to take the first step. Finally I put my foot upon the landing.

"There is some one up there," said Maurice. "I hear footsteps."

I drew back, though I had heard nothing.

"Aren't you afraid?" asked Maurice in an awed voice.

"Whether I am or not," I replied, suddenly feeling myself actuated by a sentiment of filial duty and obedience, "I don't believe father or mother would like us to go up there. Let's go home, and maybe father will come back with us tomorrow."

"That's what I think," said Maurice, heaving a sigh of relief.

We closed the door, and went back through the two intervening rooms to the front.

"Look!" said Maurice, pointing to the floor. "There are marks of shoe prints in the dust."

"They are ours," said I.

"Some of them, not all," rejoined my observant little brother. "That is a man's foot. And see, on the mantel-piece—the five fingers of a hand!"

"Yes, so it is," I answered. "But many

persons—any one might come in here, just as we did.”

“I left my cap back there,” said Maurice. “I’m going to get it, and then we’ll scoot homeward. This is a queer place.”

The last sentence, uttered in a tragic tone, made me shiver. I was ready to “scoot” at any moment. Indeed I would have preferred to have let my brother find his cap without my assistance had not loyalty upheld me. Shoulder to shoulder we returned to the room of the staircase, our footsteps resounding loudly through the empty house. Maurice found his cap, and we turned to go. At that moment, some one began to walk overhead; then we heard the sound of shuffling feet upon the stairs. We looked at each other, unable to move, though we longed to go. Nearer and nearer came the footsteps—now they were at the door. It opened slowly, swung backward, and we found ourselves face to face with a very old man. At

least so he seemed to us at that moment, for the hair that hung almost to his shoulders and the beard that swept his bosom were straggling, unkempt, and white as snow.

CHAPTER VI

THE STRANGE OLD MAN

WE WERE not so greatly frightened after all. He smiled kindly upon us, and seemed shy, I thought, noticing at the same time his eyes were brown and very bright, and that about the jaws his face looked very much like that of Jim, our hired man, when he had been long unshaven. It even seemed to me that the old man had something of apprehension in his glance.

“Well, boys,” he said, “what are you doing here?”

“We just came in,” I answered. “We have been wanting to explore this place for a long time, but we didn’t know how to get at it. To-day we found a way.”

“As I did, perhaps,” he said, advancing

into the room. "Why did you want to come here at all?"

"We just wanted to find out what the place was like," said Maurice. "It has been vacant a long time, I think. Nobody seems to know who it belongs to."

"It belongs to me," said the old man, seating himself on one of the broad window sills, and motioning us to do the same. I accepted the silent invitation and took a place beside him, but Maurice went over to the opposite window.

"Are you coming to live here?" asked my brother.

"I am living here now," was the reply. My brother looked around.

"You are thinking the place is very poorly furnished, no doubt," said the old man.

Maurice laughed. "It looks like that," he said.

"There is some furniture upstairs," said the stranger. "All I need at present.

But I am a little short of groceries, and not being well I am unable to get out for more. And I'd be very glad to see an occasional newspaper."

"Would you like us to bring you the newspaper?" I asked. "We get it every day."

"Yes, I would," he rejoined. "And now about the supplies?"

"You mean groceries?" I responded.

"Yes; some tea and bread, and a little butter—and—perhaps some cooked ham."

"You'd have to send to town," said Maurice.

"Oh, I couldn't do that," was the rejoinder. "Not by any means. You see, boys, when I came here, I thought of staying only a night or two, and I had plenty of provisions for that. But I found this place so healthful and secluded that I thought I would remain a while longer. I need seclusion at present, for my health. But I couldn't possibly send to town for

anything to eat. I couldn't possibly do it."

Silence ensued; neither Maurice nor I knew what to say.

"Do you live close by?" the old man inquired presently.

"About a mile, perhaps," I replied.

"Couldn't you get something from your house? I would pay for it, of course."

"Father wouldn't take any money," I said. "But I am sure he would be glad to let you have some provisions."

"Suppose you don't say anything about it to your father," continued the stranger. "He might be coming over to call on me, and in my condition I can't bear company. Or he might not let you return. Very likely he would think it was some old tramp. Couldn't you smuggle a little food and tell him after I'm gone?"

"I don't think we could," answered Maurice promptly. "Father is good—he would be glad to oblige you, but we

never have any secrets from him or mother."

"You don't?" said the old man. "I'm glad to hear it. Always be so. Never conceal anything from your parents. I didn't mean to give you bad advice, really I did not. But I can't explain my case; I can't explain it at all."

"I am sorry," said I. "Would you mind if we sent Jim over with some bread and tea and meat?"

"Who is Jim?"

"Our hired man."

The old man reflected. "I'll tell you what," he said. "Let Jim come, but you boys come with him and leave the things at the end of the lane. I want to be sure that Jim does not get into the garden. And bring a late daily paper. Bring several if you have them. I'm lonely here, with nothing to read, and I've concluded to stay till it's time for my steamer to sail."

"Very well," I replied. "We can do that, if father says we may. And I think he will."

Again the old man seemed to reflect.

"Who is your father?" he inquired suddenly, starting out of a reverie.

"Charles Sylvan Mayhew," I replied.

"Charles Sylvan Mayhew!" repeated the stranger, springing with wonderful alacrity for such an old man to the middle of the floor. "The famous lawyer?"

"I don't know whether he is famous or not," I said. "But he is a lawyer."

"Well, who ever heard the like!" exclaimed the venerable personage, beginning to walk up and down.

"Boys!" he cried, after he had made several turns. "You'd better go at once. And you needn't come back. I have changed my mind. I think I'll go to town myself to-morrow and fetch some furniture and a large supply of groceries. I shall enjoy being in the neighborhood of

the great lawyer. I hope we shall be very good friends." His lips twitched, his hands clasped each other nervously, and he began to beat a tattoo with one foot upon the floor. I really felt afraid of him. Touching Maurice on the arm, I edged toward the door.

"I think we will go now," I said.

"Very well; good-by. Obey your parents, be kind to each other," said the old man, once more preparing to ascend the stairs, and turning his back upon us. We left the room as quickly as we could, and hurried through the front door into the garden. We leaped over the stone wall into the lane, and mounted our bicycles. But we had not gone more than a few steps when Maurice said,

"Martin, I have lost the little memorandum book Mother gave me on my birthday. It must have fallen out of my pocket in that room. I'm going back to get it."

"Well," I replied, "I suppose it will be all right, but I'm afraid that man is half crazy. Wouldn't it be better to let the memorandum book go?"

"No, I don't want to lose it," said Maurice. "He won't hurt me."

"Well then," I rejoined, "I'll go with you." We faced about, and when we reached the garden wall I said,

"Let us go around by the kitchen way. That door is wide open. He can't see us so well then from the upstairs window."

"All right," Maurice replied. "But first I'm going to look along this path."

We examined carefully but found nothing. There was a mantelpiece with a long mirror above it, opposite the library windows. Suddenly Maurice, who was ahead of me, crouched low beneath the windows. I followed his lead, knowing it meant something.

"He mustn't see us," whispered my brother. "Keep still, and work your way

back. He would kill us if he saw us now."

I did not say a word, but crept on hands and knees till we came again to the front of the house. The memorandum book lay on the walk near the steps. My brother's face was white. He snatched the book and preceded me to the wall where we had left our bicycles, running all the way. When we had mounted again and had left the house behind us I asked, "What was it, Maurice? What was the matter?"

We paused in the lane; Maurice opened his big eyes wide.

"There is something wrong about that man," he said. "He is not old, at all."

"Not old!" I exclaimed. "Didn't you see his white hair and beard?"

"Both false!" said Maurice. "As I passed the window I glanced in, not thinking of anything. There he stood, just as young a man as father, or younger, with his hair cut close to his head. He was in

his shirt-sleeves, holding a red wig in one hand and a red beard in the other. Martin, he was going to put them on. He is an escaped criminal."

With many conjectures, we rode homeward. Never had our wheels speeded faster. When we arrived, to our great chagrin, we found father and mother absent, taking a drive. But we related our adventure to Jim, who enjoyed it, wishing he had been there, and announcing his intention of going over to see for himself as soon as he had done his chores. But we knew he would do nothing of the kind, as he was a great coward. We also told Frances, who straightway declared that she rejoiced at our safe return, but still more because she felt assured such an occurrence would result in our being forbidden to roam about the country, a privilege she had always considered unwise. Mary, the cook, was so terrified that she predicted we would all be murdered in our

beds, and called Jim from his work in the garden to repair the bolt on her bedroom door, which had sprung.

Father and mother were much interested in what we had to tell them; neither had any doubt that our strange acquaintance was a fugitive from justice.

"Jim and I will go over there to-morrow," said father, "but we will not find him. Very likely it was the mention of my name that frightened him. He thought that I might know him, perhaps, or learn through you of his whereabouts. That discovery probably made him change his plans."

It was not until the next afternoon that father found time to go over to the old house. Jim suddenly developed a toothache, but we took Rover, our big watchdog. I say *we*, for father had given us permission to accompany him. We found both doors wide open. We went through all the lower rooms without finding any

one or the trace of any one save footprints on the dusty boards. Then we followed father cautiously upstairs, where, in the first room we entered, a mattress lay upon the floor. Bacon rind and cracker crumbs were all that gave evidence of recent occupation—excepting a white wig and long straggling white beard lying upon the window sill.

“Our bird has flown,” said father, after we had gone downstairs, and seated ourselves on the doorstep. “Very likely we shall never know who was the hero of your adventure, boys.” But we were to learn it, and that very soon. Father took the paper of the preceding day from his pocket and began to read it, while my brother and I wandered about the garden.

“Come here, Maurice,” he called out, after a while. We both responded to the call.

“Did you ever see that face?” he asked, pointing to a picture in the paper.

“Why, that’s the man. Who is he, father?” cried Maurice.

“The ‘King of the Counterfeiters,’ ” he replied. “A thousand dollars is offered for his capture. See what you have missed. I think, boys, that your love of adventure ought to be satisfied for the time being.”

We talked of it for days. But a mysterious awe fell upon our young souls when father read one morning in the paper that Jenkins Preston, the “King of the Counterfeiters,” had been traced to a steamer in which he was about to leave for South America, in a well-contrived disguise, and that at the moment when the detective was about to handcuff him he jumped over the railing, and was seen no more. Though vaguely realizing that it was useless, we said some fervent prayers that night for his soul. It was a long time before we ventured again to “The House with the Golden Windows,”

though we were to have another and more satisfactory experience within its walls. But we must leave that for another chapter.

CHAPTER VII

TONITA

MRS. VANDELING was not at home when the foregoing incidents took place, but as soon as she returned we all drove over to see her, and related to her what had occurred. She was very much interested. When father told her the name of the man she replied, "He spoke truly when he said the house belonged to him, for he was the only one left of the Preston family. There were four sons. Colonel Preston, their father, believed in allowing children to have their own way, saying that it would make them self-reliant and manly. He also gave them all the money they wanted. As a natural result they became worthless young men, reducing him almost to beggary before he died.

The one you speak of was the youngest. I presume that when his own money failed him he had recourse to baser means to find more. He was very clever in many ways, and a fine engraver. Poor fellow, it would have been better if he had never learned to write, than to have become a forger and counterfeiter. The house has been abandoned for several years."

"I wonder that he did not sell it long ago," remarked my mother.

"Perhaps he had a sentimental affection for it," said Mrs. Vandeling. "If so, it stands to his credit."

We were very much impressed by these remarks and other things she told us of the Preston family. One day when we were bicycling, I proposed that we pay the old house another visit. Maurice agreed, and we rambled about the garden for some time. There were a number of fruit trees in an enclosed space behind the kitchen. They were loaded with

peaches and pears, with which we filled our pockets. We went all over the house this time; there was a lovely view from the second-story piazza.

"Let us ask mother and Mrs. Vandeling to come over some day, for a picnic," proposed Maurice.

"Yes, that would be fine," I rejoined. "We can bring some large baskets and fill them with fruit. There may be some plants here they would like."

Our plan met with general approval, but the visit was delayed until the following week. We started about nine o'clock one morning; we were to call for Mrs. Vandeling on the way. Father and mother were in the two-seated carriage; Maurice and I had our bicycles. We reached "The House with the Golden Windows" about half-past ten. Mary had provided an excellent luncheon, the baskets were deposited on the piazza, and the ladies seated themselves on the camp-

chairs we had brought in the carriage. After they had rested a while we made a tour of the garden. Mrs. Vandeling and mother were delighted with its wild beauty. Mother thought it a great pity that such a charming place could not be tenanted.

“There are so many persons who would enjoy it as a summer residence,” she said. “I wonder that some one does not buy and repair it.”

“No doubt some one will, now that the last Preston is gone,” said father. “There may be other heirs, of course; I do not know.”

The ladies were equally pleased with the inside of the dwelling, so spacious, well lighted, and solidly built with a pleasant outlook from every window. The only thing they did not like was the staircase. Maurice and I went ahead as they mounted to the second story.

“Here is the room where the man

slept!" said I, opening the door. The mattress was gone.

"What can have become of it?" said Maurice. "It was certainly here."

"Some one has been in the house," observed my father. "Probably a tramp who hauled the mattress away."

"I hardly think it could have been a tramp," said Mrs. Vandeling. "Tramps do not bother to haul mattresses about. Perhaps you are mistaken, boys, as to the room."

"No," answered father. "I am very positive it was here."

There was no furniture of any description to be found in any of the rooms. At last, in the chamber over the kitchen we came to a projecting closet about nine feet square. Perhaps I should have called it an anteroom. Martin opened the door; a tiny window set high up in the wall admitted a little light. On the floor was the missing mattress, and lying upon it sound

asleep, covered with an old horse-blanket, was a beautiful little girl. She had lovely black, curling hair; long lashes rested on the curve of her pink cheeks; her skin was quite dark, but smooth and clear. One hand was under her head, the other lay beside her. We could hear her regular breathing, but our coming did not wake her. For a moment we all stood in astonishment. No one spoke. My mother was the first to break the silence.

"Dear little creature! Who can she be?" whispered mother. "And how did she come here?"

"Perhaps a lost child, who, unable to find her way home, wandered in here and fell asleep," said my father.

But Mrs. Vandeling shook her head.

"She does not belong in this neighborhood," she said. "I know every family for miles around. And her skin is very dark. She is not an American child." My father leaned over the little bare feet.

"The child has walked far," he said. "The soles of her feet are scratched; they have been bleeding. She has not been accustomed to going barefoot."

"Let us pull the mattress out of this close place," said mother. "It may wake her, and that will be best. I can not see how the child sleeps so soundly unless she is ill, or has been drugged."

In a moment father had dragged the mattress into the room and opened one of the large windows. But still the little girl slept on. Maurice and I went back to the closet and found a little red cap on the floor. Beside it was a small empty vial. It emitted a sweet sickening odor.

"Some sleeping potion," said my father, passing it to Mrs. Vandeling.

"Yes, or may be meant for something stronger," she remarked. "I believe that child has been poisoned and left on the mattress in the closet to die."

"It is nothing but soothing syrup," said

mother. "However, this bottle full might well be supposed to kill a child of that age. She can not be more than four."

"The would-be murderer missed his work then," said father. "She is beginning to stir; she will wake soon."

The little one began to turn from side to side, half-moaning. Presently she lifted her head from the mattress, but it fell back again. She put her hand to her forehead and murmured something we could not understand. Mrs. Vandeling went close to her.

"What is it, dear?" she asked. Again the child complained.

"It is Spanish," said our neighbor. "She says her head aches."

"I will fetch some water," said Maurice, and ran downstairs. We had brought a large bottle of water, and some tumblers with us, for our luncheon. He soon returned with a glass. Mrs. Vandeling placed it to the lips of the little girl,

holding her arm around her while she drank, which she did eagerly.

"*Buena*," she said, when the glass had been drained, and once more lay down. But now her beautiful eyes were open, and she gazed about her with a charming, trustful smile, seeming to realize that we were friends. After a few moments she sat up with a happy smile, and patted Mrs. Vandeling's hand.

"What is your name, dear?" asked that lady in Spanish.

"Tonita," the child replied.

"Where do you live?"

"With Marta," was the answer. That was all the information we could get. How she came there, or with whom, she would not, or could not, tell. But she seemed very happy and content with us, though still a little drowsy. Finally, father carried her downstairs, while Maurice and I dragged the mattress after them. We placed it on the piazza, where

she lay down again and seemed anxious to stay.

At luncheon she ate little, and that very daintily.

"She is a nice child," said my mother. "She surely has been stolen. Her clothes are good; that frock is linen, embroidered by hand, showing that some one has loved her. Oh, how desolate the heart of her mother must be to-day, if she has one."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Vandeling. "She may have been brought up from Mexico by a person who wished to get rid of her for some reason. Perhaps he only intended to kidnap her at first, but later, finding her troublesome, tried to put an end to her."

"I am going to take her home with me," she went on. "I know enough Spanish to understand all she says. Afterward she may become more communicative; and herself give us a clue to her identity. She is a dear little thing; probably by the time

I shall have to give her up I shall have learned to love her very much."

Although we could not understand each other at all, Tonita, Maurice and I became great friends before the afternoon was over. We made a "chair" for her with our clasped hands, carrying her about, for her little feet were sore and swollen. She had a pretty, gurgling laugh which we loved to hear; we filled her dimpled hands with flowers, and mother made a daisy chain for her. We parted from her with great regret, and were almost selfish enough to wish that her relatives might not be found, for we both concluded that night that they had abandoned her. Maurice thought it possible, however, that she had been stolen by gipsies, and left in the old house because they feared detection. I could not agree with him in the opinion, as there had never been a gipsy seen in the neighborhood. We went over to Mrs. Vande-

ling's quite early next day, and found Tonita running about the garden chasing butterflies. Mrs. Vandeling apologized for her attire, which we thought very pretty. It was white, resurrected from an old trunk in the attic—not in the latest style, perhaps, but most becoming. Her hair had been nicely curled; she seemed a flower among the flowers. Very soon Tonita spent almost as much time at our house as she did with Mrs. Vandeling. Frances adored her, father and mother petted her, and with us she took the place of the sister we had always longed for, but never had.

Every possible effort was made to find her friends; advertisements were inserted in Mexican papers, but met with no response.

At last it was decided among us that for some reason or other Tonita had been abandoned by her relatives, and that her father and mother were dead. Mrs.

Vandeling became so fond of her that she said many times it would break her old heart to part with her. She was such a dear and treasured gift to all; Maurice and I often dwelt upon the thought of the special Providence that led us to the old house that day, where otherwise our darling Tonita might have died in the dark and lonely closet.

CHAPTER VIII

FRANÇOIS

I SHALL never forget the summer we passed at a little village on the Newfoundland coast. The Vandelings were with us; we always called Tonita Mrs. Vandeling's little girl when we spoke of her to strangers, and so thought of her in our minds. She must have been about six years old at this time—it was the second summer after we found her. I remember I had just entered my fifteenth year. Mrs. Vandeling had been at St. Hilaire when she was a child. It was a fishing-village, and the people were mostly French, simple, pious, honest, industrious folk.

During our stay we lived in the house of a fisherman named Pierre Duchesne. He was by far the richest man in the

place, though ordinarily he might have been called poor. He seemed to exercise great authority over the other fishermen, who consulted him in all their difficulties. Next to the Curé, Pierre was the most important personage in his native town. Our portion of the house was entirely detached from that of the Duchesnes', though in the same garden. For there was really not a bad makeshift for a garden in that windy, sandy village. Mère Genevieve, Pierre's wife, did our cooking, and she did it well. She was a kind, cheerful, and willing soul, much younger than her husband, who had been married before. There had been a son, the child of the first marriage, who had done something in his youth which had caused Pierre much anxiety and suffering, and for which it was said he had vowed never to forgive François. But the stepmother had loved him as well as her own children—she had three, and it made her very sad to know

that Pierre, so good and just in every other respect, could be so hard in this. The thing was the subject of talk with all the villagers, opinions being divided among them. We heard all about it through the medium of Denise, Mrs. Vandeling's French maid, who had accompanied her.

Pierre no longer went fishing; he said he was too old, but he was still a strong, sturdy man. His son Paul, a young man of twenty, and René, between sixteen and seventeen years, often went out in the boats with the others. Lucienne, the girl, was about my own age. She was full of life, and fond of all kinds of sport, though she never neglected work for play, and was of great assistance to her mother. The family were very united; there was only that one cloud over their lives. François, the son and brother, had done some disgraceful thing, and his name was never mentioned in the household.

Pierre had an old boat which he called the *Louise*, which, however, was still seaworthy, and in this he often took us out on the water.

One afternoon we were about to go sailing; I think it must have been three o'clock or half past, when Maurice and I went down to the cottage to wait for Pierre, who was mending a net. But soon we began to realize that we could not go out that day. The sky became obscured with heavy clouds, the wind began to blow, and at the suggestion of Pierre we gathered around the huge fireplace, where a pile of driftwood was already placed, ready for lighting.

"There you may all sit, eat apples, and crack nuts," said the old fisherman, "and Mère Genevieve will tell you some of her wild Breton legends. Her people are from Brittany; her grandmother was the finest story-teller I have ever heard.

And Mère Genevieve has inherited the gift. Is it not so, children?"

"Yes," said both Lucienne and her brother. "We love mother's stories."

"And you, Maurice and Martin, have great love for stories also," continued Pierre. "I have seen that already. When you go back to your distant home it will be with a store of tales the like of which you have never before heard."

It was not hard to coax Mère Genevieve to relate some of those curious Breton legends. Taking her knitting, she sat in the center of the circle about the fire which René had kindled, and we listened entranced, while the wind roared without and the waves lashed the beach. Suddenly the rain came down with redoubled fury; the very house seemed to shake as the cloudburst swept against the windows.

"God pity all that are in this storm, whether on sea or land," murmured Mère

Genevieve, making the sign of the cross. "God save them and bring them safe to their homes. Children, pray fervently this day for all poor wanderers."

The good woman sighed heavily. To my surprise Pierre said, almost harshly,

"What is the matter with you, mother? This is only a summer rain; it will be over in a short time. And as for the boys and the fishing-boats you know well there are none out to-day."

"But there may be others, far away, who need prayers," said his wife.

"The farther they are from here, the less likely to be in the center of this storm," answered Pierre, with a short, bitter laugh. "Go on, Genevieve, go on with your story. Do not frighten the children."

At that moment, some one knocked sharply at the door.

"Who is there?" demanded Pierre.

"A friend," replied the person outside.

Pierre opened the door. A coast-guard, one of the life-saving men, stood on the threshold. Behind him was a tall man, wrapped in a long, black cloak.

"It is the priest of Saint Dimas," cried Mère Genevieve, going forward.

"Yes," replied the guard. "He has business with you, good people. I must go. I am on duty."

The guard disappeared; the priest stepped inside the cottage.

Saint Dimas was about twelve miles from our village. The Curé was known only by sight to Pierre and Mère Genevieve. He was a new incumbent, having been installed after the recent death of the old priest who had served that parish more than forty years.

"Sit down, M. le Curé," said Mère Genevieve, after we had all stood up and bowed low to the priest. Maurice and I in our rough vacation clothes did not look different from the others. Indeed, we

were neither of us as handsome as the Duchesnes. The priest probably thought we were all one family, for he began at once without any hesitation.

“Pierre and Genevieve Duchesne,” he said, “I bring you news from a dying man.”

“From a dying man!” answered Mère Genevieve, growing very pale.

“Yes, but a repentant one, who is sorry for the wrong he did to your family, and the grief he has made you suffer.”

“I do not know him,” said Pierre, harshly. “I do not know him at all.”

The priest looked at him reproachfully for an instant and then replied,

“You do not know, either, what you are saying, my good man. Nor of whom I am speaking.”

“Of our son, François,” said Mère Genevieve, glancing up at the picture of a young sailor which hung above the chim-

ney-piece, and which she would never permit her husband to remove.

"I do not know the person," repeated her husband, sullenly.

"You are mistaken," rejoined the priest. "Once, you knew him well."

"He has wronged us deeply," murmured Mère Genevieve, in a tearful voice, as she glanced from the priest to her husband and back again. One could see that she was trying to excuse Pierre's manner to the Curé.

"Yes, more even than you know," said the priest. "But the most beautiful commandment of God is that which enjoins us to forgive our enemies. We all have need of mercy and forgiveness."

With these words he drew a leather portfolio from his pocket and taking a letter from its folds handed it to the fisherman. "Read for yourself," he said.

But Pierre shook his head. "I am not

learned, mon Père," he replied; "I can hardly read." And he clasped his hands behind his back.

"For ten years, up to the present year, I was chaplain at B—— prison," said the priest. "The person to whom I allude was a good prisoner, though he would never perform his religious duties. But he did many little services for me, and I tried to be kind to him. I hold the result in my hand."

The face of Pierre had grown hard and set.

"In prison!" he exclaimed. "Worse still than I feared. I tell you, M. le Curé, I do not know the man."

"Probably we are not thinking of the same person," said the priest. Then turning to Mère Genevieve he asked, "Will *you* hear this letter?"

"Yes, Father," she replied. "Kindly read it."

The priest read as follows:

“Being about to die, I repent of my past life, which has been evil; particularly of the wrong I did to my old playmate and friend, François Duchesne, solely because he was better liked and more fortunate in every way than I. I was very fond of money, and had little of it. Several times François had entrusted small sums to me to put in the bank, as my business carried me often to the city. Some of it belonged to himself, some to his father. In all it amounted to about five hundred dollars. When Pierre Duchesne went himself to the bank and found no money there, he accused his son in my presence. Then and there I exclaimed, ‘François, what did I tell you? That if you stole your father’s money, it would all come out!’ The boy was stupid with surprise; he did not say one word. Then his father turned upon him and cried out, ‘Thief, ingrate! go from these doors and never set foot inside this house

again.' And so, without trying to defend himself, he left his home, with the malediction of his father upon him. For two years I remained in St. Hilaire and then left it forever. In the city of Halifax I committed a crime for which I was sent to prison. I am dying, and sorry for my sins. I wish to release and acquit François Duchesne from the suspicion and disgrace which has lasted ten years. From a man who is confined in prison here, I have learned that he is working in the United States, in the Gloucester fisheries. I beg that Pierre Duchesne, his wife Genevieve, their children, including François, their relations, friends, and neighbors, will pardon a great sinner and pray for the wicked soul of

“LOUIS MATHIEU.”

The priest folded the paper.

“Well,” he said, addressing Pierre.
“Do you know this man?”

The old fisherman buried his face in his hands. Loud sobs came from his bosom. Mère Genevieve, Lucienne, and René were all weeping. Paul was not there. The priest laid his hand on Pierre's shoulder.

"I will do all I can to help you find your boy," he said. "I will write to-morrow."

"No, mon Père, I go there," said the old man.

"Very well. And you forgive the sinner?"

"Yes, M. le Curé, yes. I am not higher than Almighty God."

Those were the last words my brother and I heard as we stole quietly away. The storm was over, the sun shining brightly.

CHAPTER IX

THE NEW BOAT

“**B**UT will God forgive me?” These words Mère Genevieve told my mother Pierre repeated many times that evening. He wept and sobbed until she almost feared he would lose his reason. Then their own Curé was brought, who calmed the old man, and assured him that all would now be well between himself and his Maker. Then Pierre wondered whether François might not spurn his old father, who had done him so much injustice. But neither the Curé nor Mère Genevieve feared anything of the kind.

Pierre started next day; he was somewhat familiar with the place to which he was going, having been there once before. After his departure the whole house was put in readiness for the arrival of the long-

lost son and brother. The little room he had occupied, which had long been given over to odds and ends, was scrubbed and garnished; his picture taken from the wall, the glass removed, and cleaned, and put back again; the gilt frame scoured with soap and water. It was a fresh, boyish face, honest and sweet. Maurice and I both wondered how the father could have doubted such a son.

“What to me was the strangest,” said Mère Genevieve, pausing in her polishing of the window-panes, “was the quickness with which the poor boy did as his father told him. He did not try to excuse himself; he did not say one single word. Only his blue eyes filled, and his lips trembled so—oh, how they trembled. And then when I came in here to talk to him, and see if I could not do something, he was gone. I see now that he was so cast down by the story of that wicked Louis and so wounded that his father believed it, he had

to go without one word. Poor, poor François!”

“What was Louis like?” I inquired.

“Not to my taste—ever,” said Mère Genevieve. “Too sweet and oily in his speech—too great a flatterer, was Louis Mathieu. He had only his old grandmother and he left her to be cared for by strangers. Yet I did not think he could do so vile a thing as he has done. But ‘God forgive him,’ is what we must say now.”

“Did you believe François had stolen the money, Mère Genevieve?” asked Maurice.

“I am afraid I did,” she replied. “He did not deny it; he did not even try to deny it. What else could I think? But I was very sorry for the boy, and have grieved very much at the obstinacy of his father, who has suffered too, in his heart. Now he will be a young man again—when he has found François. The villagers had

never known the cause of the banishment of François until now, save through hints let fall by Louis Mathieu. They had suspected the truth, and all are rejoiced that the boy has been vindicated, because he was a general favorite."

Louis Mathieu had died in prison.

It was a happy day in the village when Pierre came home, accompanied by the son whom he had driven away ten years before. Somehow, everybody seemed to have forgotten that he must have grown older; they expected to see the young, beardless boy who had left St. Hilaire so suddenly and under such sorrowful and disgraceful circumstances.

But instead they saw a stalwart man of thirty, with a beard like his father's, only that it was brown. The eyes, too, were the same, but the smile and the voice belonged to François himself, and were a great charm. The past seemed to be entirely blotted from his mind; he rejoiced in his

father and mother, his brothers and little sister, in his home and friends. We were soon included among the latter.

François at once set about building a boat; he had learned to do it, with numerous other things, since his departure. He had also been in many lands, having shipped as a sailor, and continued at sea almost from the time of his departure until his return home. He had accumulated a large number of souvenirs of different countries, and closely observed the habits and customs of the various people among whom his life had been cast. He afforded us many a pleasant and profitable hour as we sat beside him, day after day, while he fashioned *The Swallow*, a trim and swift little craft, with the carven figure of the bird for whom it had been named poised at the bow, ready for flight.

Better than all, François had kept his early faith and piety and told us of many churches and shrines he had seen, as well

as of a visit to Lourdes, where he had seen a man arise and walk who had been bed-ridden for thirty years.

François was particularly fond of Tonita, who followed him about everywhere, and for whom he made a beautiful miniature boat, complete in every respect, and with a shapely sail. This he called *La Golondrinita*¹ in compliment to the supposed nationality of Tonita.

At last the new boat was ready. François was to launch it next morning. We had often gone out with Pierre, and now mother had given us leave to try the new boat, perfectly certain that we would be as safe with François as we had been with his father.

Before starting we had an edifying and touching ceremony. The Duchesnes brought down a bottle of holy water, which Mère Genevieve broke on the prow of the boat, saying as she did so, "I baptize

¹ The little swallow.

thee *The Swallow of Saint Mary.*" Then we all knelt, and lifting up his eyes to heaven, with head uncovered, Pierre prayed as follows:

"O God of the winds and the waves, who holdest both in the hollow of Thy hand, bless this work of ours and bear it safely upon the waters. Send it forth in paths of peace only; bring it home again to its moorings from every voyage. Be Thou its guide and pilot, its beginning and its end. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

After a moment's respectful silence, François produced a bottle of red wine which he opened, every one taking a sip. The little craft was now pronounced ready. In a few seconds it was riding gallantly on the waves, and we were all waving our hands to the older members of the party, who were watching us from the shore.

The sea was splendid that morning; at

the horizon a deep purplish blue, melting into a dark, then a brighter green, fringed with amethyst and rose, near the sandy shore. The sun shone in a cloudless sky; it was an ideal day.

"What beautiful weather!" exclaimed Lucienne, who sat in the stern with her arm around Tonita. Just behind her Paul presided at the helm.

"It is fine, it is fine," cried Tonita. "I wish we could live in this boat, always, always."

"Just as you are? Away from mama and friends?" asked Lucienne.

"Oh, no," answered the child. "In a larger boat then, with everybody."

"Wait a while. You may get seasick. Then you will not like it so well," said Maurice.

"We are not going any farther than Rochemont. That is at the head of the bay," said François. "I used to be so fond of that place; now I am going to see

it again. I wonder if it has changed very much."

"Not much," answered Paul. "Some of the rocks have been washed away, that is all."

The boat went more and more swiftly, the sails looked like the wings of a white bird. We sat quietly skimming the waves; the sensation of moving on the rippling surface of the water was delightful.

"Turn now, turn now," cried François, sharply, after a while.

"You do not forget anything," said the boy. "This is just the place I was going to turn when you spoke."

"No, I have forgotten nothing," rejoined François. "I have been here many a time in my dreams."

A few moments later we came to the great rock which gave the place its name. Its triangular peak jutted pointedly above the water. Small, sharp rocks projected from the shore far into the bay.

"It is nearly high tide," said François. "We could not get so close if it were not. On the other side there is a cave. Perhaps we may be able to explore it."

"Can we go in with the boat?" asked Maurice.

"Oh, no," replied François. "We must land first, then climb a little hill, and go down another until we reach the entrance of the cave. Isn't that the way, Paul?"

"Yes, that is right," answered Paul.

We skirted the shore for some moments. At length François called out, "Enough, stop."

In the twinkling of an eye Paul and René were in the water, which came almost to their knees, each with the end of a rope in his hand. François followed, the boat was pulled up quickly, grating along the sand, and we all disembarked. The rope was fastened securely around a sharp, slender rock which stood like a dwarf sentinel on the beach, and we pre-

pared to ascend the winding path, François leading the way, with great strides. We were obliged to run in order to keep up with him. It wound around and round, ending abruptly on a narrow platform, on the other side of which a similar path descended. François now took Tonita on his shoulder, still leading, the rest following. Not far from the shore a flock of seals had gathered; we could see their brown heads lifted above the water, as they uttered their short, harsh barks. The rocks began to grow larger. They were close together, forming a series of narrow passages, leading to our destination. The ground was full of little deep, clear pools, in which crabs and other small fish disported themselves. Some of them were red, some green, while others seemed to display all the colors of the rainbow. Limpets clung to the slimy rocks and there were mussels in the larger pools. But we had no time to stay to ex-

amine all these delightful curiosities; the grotto must be visited first. Suddenly a large rock blocked the pathway. Beneath it was an irregular opening, neither very high nor wide.

“This is the Grotto of the Frogs,” said François. “It has not changed at all since I last saw it, more than ten years ago. Shall we go in?”

And like so many sheep we followed our leader.

CHAPTER X

THE GROTTO OF THE FROGS

“**W**HY do they call it such a funny name?” asked Tonita, as François lifted her to his shoulder, so that she might not cut her feet on the sharp stones on the floor of the little cave.

“Because,” answered Paul, “there used to be a long, narrow pool at one side where the frogs bred and croaked forever. They were always here.”

“I do not see or hear any now,” said the child.

“The pool dried up suddenly,” rejoined René. “One day it was here full of frogs; the next time people came it was gone and the frogs with it.”

“Maybe fairies!” said Tonita, in a low voice.

“Perhaps,” replied Maurice. “We

could make a good story of that, Martin.”
(We had already begun to write stories.)

Meanwhile, the narrow opening by which we entered had been left behind. As we progressed, the irregular floor seemed to ascend, the walls stretched apart, the rocky ceiling arched more and more. At the end of the cave, where several points of light penetrated through narrow slits in the side, stood a huge block of granite, terminating at the top in a cylindrical knob, shaped by the action of the water, which at high tide trickled down the rock, forming minute pools at the base of the granite. On the land side of the cave numerous small passage-ways, about large enough for the body of a man to pass through, seemed to lead nowhere but to intense darkness. All about the base of the large boulder small flat stones had been piled upon each other two and two. They served for seats, and we quickly utilized them for that purpose. It was

very pleasant in the cave after one had been accustomed to the semi-darkness. The atmosphere was pure, and the noise of water falling drop by drop made an agreeable sound.

"It is like a leaky roof during a heavy rain," said François. "A drop here, a drop there, and you never know where to expect the next. It makes me sleepy; it always did. The grotto has hardly changed, René."

"No, I remember it this way since I was a very little child," replied the boy.

Suddenly René sprang up, and with a loud cry disappeared in one of the dark aisles. His voice echoed through the cave again and again, till we thought it would never cease. Tonita was disposed to be afraid, but we all reassured her. In a few moments René appeared once more, saying,

"It is all right, back there in the dark cave, François. Shall we take them in?"

"You are not afraid to come?" asked François.

"Not if you carry me," said Tonita. The others had no fears. René ran ahead, and presently we came upon him at the end of the dark passage busily lighting three torches of pine wood. He handed one to Paul, one to me, and kept the third himself. It was very dark in this portion of the cave, but the place was smaller than the outer grotto, and the torches were quite sufficient to illuminate it. Large stalactites hung from the roof; in the light of the torches these took on all the tints of the rainbow. In the middle of the open space there was a circular mass of granite shaped like a large table.

"This is the Dining Hall of the Gnomes," exclaimed Maurice.

"That would be a fine name for it," said Paul. "Mother has told us of many such caves in her legends."

The atmosphere in this portion of the

cave was not so good as that in the other. We returned in a few moments and again sought the open air. On our way out we startled a long procession of crabs, making their way to the little pools. We lingered to watch them until François said,

“It is time to go back to the boat. Let us hasten our steps. We must not lose the tide.”

We hurried as fast as we could, Tonita again on François’ shoulder. But when we reached the spot where we had left the boat, it was not there.

“What can have become of it?” exclaimed our captain. “Did you fasten it securely, Paul?”

“Yes, I am sure of that,” replied his brother. “Some one must have taken it.”

François had a glass in his pocket. He put it to his eyes, and scanned the waters. At some distance out a boat was visible.

“Is it drifting?” asked Paul.

"No, there seem to be two persons in it. And it is our boat. What shall we do?"

"They may come back," said Paul. "They may have meant to take it only for a short time."

"But that we do not know," said François. "And in the meantime the tide is rising, and we shall not be able to wait to see what they are going to do. We shall have to go around by land over the rocks. It is a long, long walk."

"If we can only get away from here up to the cliffs, we might wait for the boat," said Paul. "I am sure that no thief has taken it."

"But then the tide will be low, and we can not beach it," said François. "However, there is nothing to be done now but get off of these rocks before high tide."

We rather enjoyed the element of danger in our return trip from the grotto. Now and then a high wave would graze our

footsteps, at which we would cry out and then hope for another. Tonita, high and dry, on the shoulder of François, was in her element. When we reached the cliff's the boat was out of sight. Presently a boy came running toward us. His name was Roque and he lived in one of the few huts that formed the tiny fishing village of Ambrais.

"Was that your boat, Paul?" he cried, as he neared us.

"Yes, it was ours," rejoined Paul. "What do you know of it?"

"Jean took it out. We did not see him till he had gone. He has Mère Toner's boy with him. They are both idiots, but Jean can manage a boat all right. He is crazy for sailing; it is not the first time he has run away with a boat."

"Who is Jean," asked François of Paul. "Is it true that he knows how to manage a boat?"

"He is the son of the widow Conard,"

said Paul. "He is a grown man, and I have seen him sailing."

"They do not let him go fishing with the others because he takes fits," said Roque. "But he will do no harm to your boat. I believe he is turning around now."

"I hope he does not have a fit while he is commanding our new *Swallow*," said François. "But we must trust to Providence, Paul; if we wait here it may be almost low tide when he comes in. In that case we will have to take it around by the cave, which will keep us here too long. It would be dark night before we got home. If there is any wagon to be found hereabouts, we would better go back by land. That is, most of us. You and René stay here to bring the boat home."

"Yes, there is a wagon and two mules," said Roque. "It belongs to Jean Michel; he will gladly lend it to you. Shall I tell him?"

"No, we will go over there," said François. "A good thing that we took the precaution to hide our luncheon behind the rocks, or we would not have had any."

"What prudent person did that?" I inquired. "Neither Maurice nor I would have thought of it."

"François told me to do it," said Lucienne. "Here it is."

We were glad to see that great basket, filled with good things, and rather pleased than otherwise at the prospect of driving home. When we came to the group of huts, we found Jean Michel, an old man in his bare feet, mending a net. He recognized François at once from his resemblance to Pierre in his youth, and welcomed him warmly, with many a blessing.

Oh, yes, he would lend the wagon, and ask no pay for it either, except perhaps a sack of fodder, which was very high just now. And perhaps a bit of dried beef. Mère Genevieve had the secret of curing

beef, as had no other housewife in the five parishes.

Under the shade of an old boat we ate our plentiful luncheon, and then François said it was time to start, as we had a good three hours' ride before us. After we had started we saw Paul and René, accompanied by Roque, running forward to the top of the cliffs; from which we inferred that the boat had again been sighted. I was very much impressed by the calmness with which François encountered every disagreeable incident. His large, placid eyes and gentle face were patience personified, a patience which had been his birth-right and which had enabled him to endure injustice and banishment for so many years and to forgive his enemies and those who had deeply though unwittingly wronged him.

That was a merry ride, even though it seemed that our bones would be jolted out of our bodies before we reached home.

For part of the way there was no road save that indicated by scattered wagon tracks of infrequent occurrence; for these peopled traveled mostly by water from hamlet to hamlet. The highroad was too long and circuitous for them.

Great was the surprise of our friends when they saw us arriving in the huge wagon. At first they feared that some accident had befallen us, but our joyful shouts soon told them otherwise. The moon was high in the heavens when Paul and René reached St. Hilaire, our lively little *Swallow* none the worse for her adventurous trip.

Jean had brought her back in good time, and had secured some fine scarpino on the other side of the island, several of which the boys had brought home. Mère Genevieve fried them for breakfast, and every one declared they had never tasted such delicious fish in their lives. We all went about with aching bones for a couple

of days, but we had enjoyed our trip so well that if we had been invited to repeat it there would not have been a single dissenting voice.

A few days after this, Mrs. Vandeling received a telegram requesting her to return immediately, as important business was awaiting her. Our stay at St. Hilaire was thus cut short, and we were all greatly disappointed, including the Duchesne family, who had become deeply attached to us. Our sojourn among them had taught us that the rarest and most attractive virtues are to be found among the poor, especially when they have the true ideal and practice of religion. The good Curé also had treated us with the greatest kindness. On the night before our departure, Maurice and I went with father to take leave of him once more; he had already bidden adieu to mother and Mrs. Vandeling.

There, to our surprise, we found Pierre,

Mère Genevieve, and François. The mother had been crying; there were still tears upon her pale cheeks. The aspect of all three was very serious.

"I hope you are not in trouble," said my father, looking from one to the other.

"We are and we are not, Sir," replied Pierre. "Here we were just rejoicing at the return of our François, and—and—"

"Shall I tell them?" he continued, turning to his son.

"Very well," was the reply. "They are discreet; they are going away; they have been our very good friends and tenants; it is not important to them, of course, but it will do no harm."

Here Mère Genevieve burst into tears.

"I am a wicked woman," she exclaimed. "I ought only to be glad."

"But what is it?" asked my father, while Maurice and I were consumed with curiosity.

"On Monday François goes to Gethsemani," said Pierre.

"To the Garden of Olives," cried Maurice. "So far? But why lament for that—it must be a fine journey to take."

"To Gethsemani in Kentucky, I mean," said Pierre. "He goes to be a monk at La Trappe."

Ah! we understood now why François had seemed to know so much about those good men who devote their lives to the service of God and perpetual silence. At that moment he took on a new aspect for us; he seemed as one set apart from our world, and so it was, he was about to renounce it!

"Yes," he said, with one of his delightful smiles. "I would have gone long ago, but that I was under a ban, and could not go. Now, it is all settled—and I am happy."

We went home in the twilight together for the last time, François more gay than

we had ever seen him, Pierre and Mère Genevieve depressed and silent, the rest of us also a little sad. Our pleasant vacation was over; travelers upon the sea of life, our barks had hailed each other in passing and were now to pursue their different paths, never to meet again.

CHAPTER XI

NEW ACQUAINTANCES

WHEN we reached home we found that "The House with the Golden Windows" was occupied. It had been painted, the garden put in order, and little children were playing about the lawn.

We did not know whether to rejoice or be sorry at this new state of affairs; the place had seemed to belong to us; we had delighted in roaming about the overgrown garden and running through the dusty rooms. Mrs. Vandeling and our parents were pleased at the change, however, and the former at once set about discovering the names and prestige of our new neighbors. Mrs. Vandeling was eccentric, often brusk, but she was always on good terms with those about her, though chary of giving her friendship until she felt

confident of congeniality and kindness on the other side. One morning she drove over in the pony phaeton; Tonita was with her.

"I have found out who our neighbors are," she said. "They are very nice people. It is the family of the Consul at C——. His wife is delicate. They have taken the place for a year."

"Do they speak English?" inquired my mother.

"Oh, yes. I believe Madame Garriga was educated at Manhattanville. She seems very sweet—and the children are lovely."

"Have you called?" asked mother.

"Oh, no. We must go together. Can you come to-day?"

"Yes," was the reply. "Whenever you please."

"We shall be quite a little Catholic colony now," said Mrs. Vandeling. "I think

I shall be able to get a priest down occasionally for Mass."

Tonita was already running about the garden with Maurice. I remained seated on the piazza, where we had been reading when they arrived.

"Perhaps you may be able to find Tonita's friends now," I said.

"That possibility has occurred to me," remarked Mrs. Vandeling. "And I confess to you, Martin, that it has filled me with dread. I do not know how I could give up the child. Still, it is my duty to do what I can to learn who she is."

"I don't think you need have any fears," said my father. "Tonita will not be taken from you. You advertised in a great many papers, both here and in Mexico. If she was a child whom people wished to reclaim, you would have heard long ago from her relatives."

"Yes, it is likely. Still I shall be un-

easy, nevertheless," answered our kind neighbor.

Father and mother and Mrs. Vandeling made their call in the afternoon. They were charmed with our new neighbors. There were two boys, younger than Maurice and myself, two little girls, twins, about Tonita's age, and a baby a year old. And they had two Japanese servants. This made Maurice and myself very anxious to call; we were greatly interested in Japan, and had never seen a Japanese.

Mrs. Vandeling had told the new people about Tonita; they had seemed much interested in the story.

Before the week had expired we were already on the way to being good friends. The boys were intelligent and well-bred, and the little girls were charming; my father took pleasure in having made a new and agreeable acquaintance, and my mother was greatly attracted toward the Señora. It seemed they had both been

pupils, though at different times, at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in Brussels. This was a bond between them.

Until the novelty wore off I think the interest of Maurice and myself was confined chiefly in the Japanese boys. They were small and brown, with such bright, sparkling eyes; they looked so clean and neat in their white jackets and aprons, which they never seemed to soil, though they wore them all day; they were so capable, kind, and obliging that we were never tired of watching them and talking to them. The Consul had secured them in California; they were both students, devoting nearly all their spare time to the study of English and Spanish. But after we had learned to know the boys, our chief interest in one of them centered in the fact that he was a pious Catholic. He had early been left an orphan and had been taken in by the Marist Brothers at Tokio. He could speak French very

well, and had a fair knowledge of Italian. He had a great desire to travel, and had been taken as cabin-boy on one of the few Japanese cruisers that have visited America. On the vessel there was also a Japanese officer who was a Catholic. These two were the only Christians on board, though the crew numbered 750, including officers.

"I was then Consul at San Diego," said Señor Garriga. "The vessel put in there, remaining nearly two weeks. The sailors were excellently well-behaved, frequenting *not* the saloons, when on leave, but the book stores and picture stores. I happened to learn from the pastor of the Catholic church a most edifying incident concerning these two young men. Neither the officer nor the cabin-boy was off duty in the morning. Therefore they could not attend Mass. But as both wished to go to confession and communion, they fasted till between two and three

in the afternoon one day, came over from the boat, and received the sacraments.¹ It was there that Tanaka left the ship and entered our service. He has been with us ever since."

"They seem far superior to the Chinese, do they not?" inquired Mrs. Vandeling.

"Well, I can not say that," answered the Consul. "These boys are an exception, Tanaka because he is a Christian and a Catholic, and Yanno I think from his association with Tanaka. But, as a rule, I consider the Japanese far less reliable than the Chinese. Their appearance is more attractive, they accommodate themselves to American ways more readily, but they are less cleanly, less truthful, less interested in their employers and their concerns than the Chinese. The word of a Chinaman is as good as his bond. He will often do more than he contracts to do; a Japanese—never." I confess we were greatly disappointed to hear this, but it

¹ A fact.

did not lessen our admiration for the two boys we knew, especially Tanaka.

After a while we observed, however, that both were always especially pleased at any relation of sharp proceedings by which one person, for instance, had taken advantage over another. We told this to father one evening, and he said:

“That is probably in their blood. Tanaka is, no doubt, a very good Catholic, and would not himself take advantage of any one, but there is something in him that he inherits from generations of ancestors who were nurtured in other paths.”

Once father had a good joke at our expense.

“Once, in Yokohama,” said Maurice, evening, “to a story Tanaka told us this afternoon.”

“Very well, what is it?” asked mother.

“Once, in Yokohama,” said Maurice, “and this is the truth, Tanaka said, an Englishman went into a shop where they

sold animals to buy a certain kind of Japanese dog. They did not have what he wanted. 'I have looked everywhere for that kind of dog,' he said, 'and am very sorry to have to go away without it. I would pay well for one.'

" 'When do you go?' asked the shopkeeper. 'Perhaps I may be able to get you one.'

" 'To-morrow,' said the man.

" 'Very well,' said the merchant. 'If you will tell me where to send the dog I promise you it will be there in time.'

"The Englishman told the man to send it to the railway station. When he got there the dog was waiting—an odd-looking dog, with white spots on a dark-colored skin. It was a pretty little thing though, and the gentleman liked it. He paid for it, and was going to take it in the car with him when a telegram came for him from the hotel.

" 'I can not start to-day,' he said to his

valet, who was standing by the luggage. 'We must return to the hotel.'

"As they were walking back it started to rain very hard, and soon the white spots began to spread all over the dog. They had been painted, and when they got to the hotel the dog was a funny sight. The dog-seller had thought that the gentleman would not find out the trick until he was far away. The Englishman was so angry that he went to the shop at once with the dog.

" 'What do you mean by selling me such a dog, by fooling me this way?' he asked. And what do you think that shopkeeper did, father?"

"He was very much embarrassed, I suppose, and hardly knew what to do," answered father.

"Well, he wasn't," replied my brother. "He just turned to his clerk and said:

" 'Boy, how did you forget to take an umbrella with that dog? Don't you

know that an umbrella always goes with that kind of dog, without extra charge?" And the Englishman was so full of laughter at the smart trick and the coolness of the Japanese that he walked away without getting his money back."

"I can hardly credit that," said father, laughing, "but it *was* certainly a smart trick."

"Well," said Maurice, "Tanaka and Yanno thought that was one of the best things they had ever heard. I suppose it must be true that the Japanese are great tricksters, don't you think so, father?"

"Perhaps," answered my father. "But did not you and Martin laugh at it, and are not mother and I laughing now? It strikes me that human nature is, on the whole, very much akin wherever you find it."

"I suppose you are right," said Maurice, slowly, after a moment's reflection. I could not help agreeing with him.

We asked Tanaka and Yanno many questions concerning the jinrikisha men of Japan. We thought it would be a fine thing to be carried about by boys who ran between shafts like horses. Tanaka told us that everybody laughed the first time they entered a rikisha. There is some danger, also. The rikisha boys go in single file, but one is always trying to pass the other, and people are often knocked down in the street. They simply pick themselves up again, Tanaka told us, and made no fuss, unless they were foreigners. But they were usually careful not to knock down strangers. Yanno told us that the rikisha boys generally die young, and from heart disease, because they have to run so much, up hill and down hill, all day long, and far into the night.

Both Tanaka and Yanno said they intended to go back to Japan some day, but also said they feared it would be hard for them to conform to some of the Japanese

customs, or to eat the food. Strange to say, neither of them cared for rice or tea, possibly because they had had too much of them at home. Tanaka told us a curious thing about his family. It seems they lived in a village not far from the place where the first Christian converts were massacred in the sixteenth century. His people knew nothing, or very little, of this, but for several generations the name of Fuyuso, meaning "blessed," had been given to the eldest boy. After he had learned something of Christianity, Tanaka concluded that his ancestors had been among the converted Christians; perhaps some were even martyrs. He believed they had given the name to their sons out of reverence for our Saviour. It was delightful to listen to his descriptions of the miniature gardens of Japan, of its wonderful temples, nearly all hidden by trees, of its quaint customs, of its cool, clean houses.

“They are *cold*, clean houses in winter though,” said Yanno one day. “We have only braziers to keep us warm. But we do not mind it there.”

Each of the boys had a Japanese flute on which they played every evening. Mrs. Vandeling said the music reminded her very much of music she had heard in Ireland, which rather offended Frances and Mary, who were not partial to brown skins of any kind.

CHAPTER XII

A DISCOVERY

TONITA soon became very friendly with the little Garriga children, and, strange to say, she also began to talk Spanish with them very fluently, although she had not spoken any for more than two years. Señor Garriga had a cousin, a doctor, who was living at C——. The doctor was invited to spend a few days at the new country residence. He came, saw Tonita, and her story was told to him.

“One can not tell,” he said, “whether it is not the greatest blessing that could have happened to this child that she should have fallen into such good hands. I can not believe she was stolen. Yet it would be a satisfaction to know that she was not

being kept from her parents who still mourn her. She may come of nice people, and she may not. In Mexico the children of the poorest and commonest peons are sometimes as sweet and beautiful as those of the better class."

"She is too fair to have been of the peon class," said Señor Garriga. "She is of a higher class."

"Of course it would be only justice to restore her to her people, if they want her and can be discovered," said Mrs. Vandeling. "But for my part, I feel that there is no one in Mexico who has wept as much for our little Tonita, as we would here should she be taken away from us."

"She has certainly fallen in good hands," said Doctor de Luna, and the subject was dropped.

The doctor was about to take his departure when he inquired whether there was any out-of-door place to be filled among the servants at the Garrigas.

"I have a patient," he said, "a young man. He has seen better days, but has led a dissipated life, has been discarded by his relatives, has spent a great deal of money, and can not live long. I would like to get him into the country for a while. He has a passion for gardening."

"Well, let him come," said Señor Garriga. "But will it not be awkward to treat such a person as a servant?"

"No," replied the doctor. "He need not know that I have told you anything. He will not expect to be treated otherwise. He has lost nearly all his self-respect."

"So, so," rejoined the Señor. "We must do a good turn to a fellow countryman when we can. Let him come."

Refugio came. He was a silent man, though kind. He seemed depressed and ill. When he arrived the Consul told father he looked about him in a frightened way and said, "I can not stay here. I can

not stay here." But at last they persuaded him to remain for a few days at least, and he consented.

Fernando and Arturo Garriga, Maurice, and I were helping him pot some geraniums one morning when Mrs. Vandeling and Tonita drove up in the carriage to bring some melons, of which our friend had a large quantity in her garden. Tonita had grown a great deal, her skin was not so dark as it had been, her curls, which had clung to her head, now fell about her shoulders.

Rosa and Pietra, the little girls, ran forward to welcome her, crying, "Tonita, Tonita, have you come to spend the day?" As they made the exclamation Refugio looked around, bowed to Mrs. Vandeling, and leaning on his spade surveyed the little girl; I saw him bite his lips, saw the tremor of his hands, and great drops of perspiration breaking out upon his forehead. The child ran off with the others,

and Refugio returned to his occupation. For a long time he was silent; then, turning to me, he asked:

“Is that the grandchild of the old lady? No?”

“She is a little girl Mrs. Vandeling has adopted,” I said.

“Since when?”

“About two years ago.”

“Ha!” murmured Refugio, drawing a long breath. “She has grown; she looks well cared for and happy.”

“Did you ever know her?” asked Maurice, coming nearer to Refugio.

“Yes, I did know her,” was the reply.

“Are you sure?” I inquired.

“Mrs. Vandeling will be glad to hear that,” said Maurice. “She has tried very hard to find the relatives of Tonita. But I hope she will never be taken away from us.”

“I think not,” said Refugio, throwing down his spade. “Boys, will you take me

to that lady? I can not work any more until I have seen her."

Maurice went in search of Mrs. Vandeling, who said she would come down to the garden to see the gardener. In this way we heard everything that was said.

"It is about the little girl," he began. "The boys have told me about her. I asked them some things—because I know her."

"You know her!" exclaimed Mrs. Vandeling, turning very pale.

"Yes, sit down, madame; here is a bench. Do not fear; it will be all right. She will not leave her good home."

"Where did you know her?" asked Mrs. Vandeling, sitting down.

"In Mexico. She is my niece, the daughter of my brother. I brought her here."

"You!" exclaimed Mrs. Vandeling, angrily. "It is you then, who left her in this forsaken house—for it was forsaken

then? It is you who tried to murder her?"

"Yes, it was I," rejoined Refugio. "I thought I had sent her safely to Heaven. But always the fear followed me that perhaps she might not have died, and if she had not, I wondered where she was, and if she had, then perhaps her death was on my soul."

The man was weak and delicate, he could hardly stand; he seemed about to fall.

"Sit down there," said Mrs. Vandeling. "Tell me all your story."

He obeyed her and resumed: "It was for love, not for hate, that I did the thing, madame. My brother, my twin brother, he was very foolish. He married a girl who was very pretty and she was also good. But she was of a low class, a very low class. Her father had a wineshop in the City of Mexico. We were both foolish, my brother Antonio and I. We spent

much money—we spent all. We did not know how to work. He died at last, and the widow went back to her mother. I loved the baby, our little Tonita, and I could not bear that she should be there, in that place. Then the mother also died, and the grandmother did not care for the child—I knew it. She was willing to give her, or to sell her, to me. Then I had heard that in the United States they wanted many Spanish-speaking clerks, and I thought I might be a clerk there. I gave to old Marta twenty reales for Tonita, and we went away afterward.”

“How long was she with you?” asked Mrs. Vandeling.

“Maybe six months, and they were hard months. Oh, I could tell you many things, and you would then say, madame, that it was better that I should let the little one die!”

“No, no,” replied the old lady quickly. “That is false reasoning—but—go on.”

“Very well. I could get nothing to do—then I could hardly speak English, and soon we had no more money. I could not ride in the cars; my leg was sore—I could hardly step along. The child must walk. I could no longer carry her, and she cried. So I went into the store and I bought some ‘Sirop.’ Often I did read that a bottle of it had killed a baby. Many days we went, some people gave us to eat. Every day I lost my courage to give to Tonita that ‘Sirop.’ Then we came to the lonely house, and we had no more bread. I gave it to her and she drank it—all. I watched her fall asleep. Then I hurried away.”

“You gave her too much,” said Mrs. Vandeling. “It served only to put her in a long sleep. There we found her—thank God.”

Refugio lifted his cap. “*Gracios a Dios,*” he repeated. “It is well with Tonita.”

"I wonder that your conscience did not trouble you," said Mrs. Vandeling.

"It did, madame, it did, as I told you," Refugio replied. "First, I want to tell you. I wanted to kill myself, too—after the child. But everywhere that night I saw the face of my mother and to throw myself in the river I could not. In two weeks I came back to the lonely house. She was gone. 'She is buried,' thought I. 'Some one has found her. She is in heaven.' And so I went away—sometimes glad that I had sent her there, sometimes sorry that I had, to wonder if God would forgive me. And so, I am nearly at an end, and soon I will make my confession and thank God that He has given a home to the child. But now maybe you will put me in prison."

"Have no fear. Poor creature! Poor creature!" said the old lady. "It is not for me to judge any man, but you would not have been brought to such an evil pass

if you had followed the counsels of your mother."

"Never," said Refugio. "She was a saint—my mother."

"Will you fetch Tonita, Martin?" asked Mrs. Vandeling. I hastened to call her, and she came running to the garden, holding my hand.

"Do you remember this young man, Tonita?" inquired her adopted mother.

The child looked at Refugio for some time. She wrinkled her pretty brows, smiled, shook her head, then came a step nearer, and gazed at the gardener. Suddenly a great wave of color spread over her face—she put out her hand.

"It is Tio Refugio," she said. But the young man turned away, and leaning his head on his arms on the back of the bench he burst into tears.

"Why does he cry?" whispered the child. "Why does he not speak to me? I wanted to shake hands with him."

No one knew what to do or say. We stood watching him in silence. He shook with sobs, but they soon subsided and turning toward us he said:

“It is not the part of a man to cry, but I am so glad—it is such a relief to me—to see the child alive, so well and so happy. Yes, *chiquita*, it is Tio Refugio,” he continued, taking the child’s hand in his, and kissing her on the forehead. She did not shrink from him; in her dainty white gown and pretty hat she seemed to feel no repugnance to his toil-worn garments and grimy hands. She was a dear little Tonita.

After that, Refugio seemed to be able to work no more. The next day he could not get up, and when Saturday came again, and Doctor de Luna returned, he thought it better to have him removed to the Hospital in C——. There he died; his funeral expenses were paid by Mrs. Vandeling, whose mind was now relieved of

the great uncertainty regarding the future of the little girl whom she had learned to love so dearly, and who made her lonely life so bright. She lost no time in changing the will she had made sometime before, in order to make provision for Tonita when she had gone. My father was appointed her guardian. We all hoped that many years would pass before our dear old friend should be called to her reward, but it was otherwise ordained. Tonita was only eight years old when her benefactress died. Mrs. Vandeling's children, who were already rich, were quite displeased that so large a sum should have been left to a child whom she had taken under such circumstances. They lived in Europe. Several of them came over to this country, intending to dispute the will. If they had, it might have made a great deal of trouble and expense for them, but not much for Tonita, who was under the guardianship

of my father, a most clever lawyer, as by this time Maurice and I had learned, to our great pride and satisfaction. Seeing that they could not break the will, Mrs. Vandeling's children, who had treated her coldly and ungratefully during her life, now divided her portion among them, quarreled over her furniture, curios, and jewelry, and returned to Europe embittered against each other, my father, and the helpless little creature to whom their mother had bequeathed not more than a hundredth part of what she possessed. But we were all happy, for Tonita was well provided for; she had a comfortable income, and we had Tonita. But if she had been left penniless she would have been welcome and beloved in our home as daughter and sister. I do not believe it possible that we could have loved our own sister more. Gentle, loving, and kind, bright, clever, and accomplished, she has been for years the joy of our lives and

consolation of our father and mother. Better than all, in a few months she will marry my brother Maurice, who will never take her away from us. For myself, I have quite decided to remain an old bachelor.

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